Roberto de Nobili was one of the earliest Jesuit missionaries to address the complex issue of how the Christian faith is to be communicated to and appropriated by a local non-European culture. The three treatises presented in this volume are classic examples of the process now called "inculturation". The translators have provided us with vivid representations of de Nobili's thought and method, beginning with an introducing that does not hesitate to critique his approach even as it appreciates his greatness.

Anand Amaladass S.J., is Professor of Indian Philosophy and Religion at the Satya Nilayam Jesuit Philosophy Centre in Chennai and also Director of the Satya Nilayam Research Institute for Philosophy and Sanskrit there. Francis X. Clooney S.J. is Professor of Comparative Theology and Parkman Professor of Divinity at the Harvard University, USA

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Preaching Wisdom to the Wise

Translated and Introduced By
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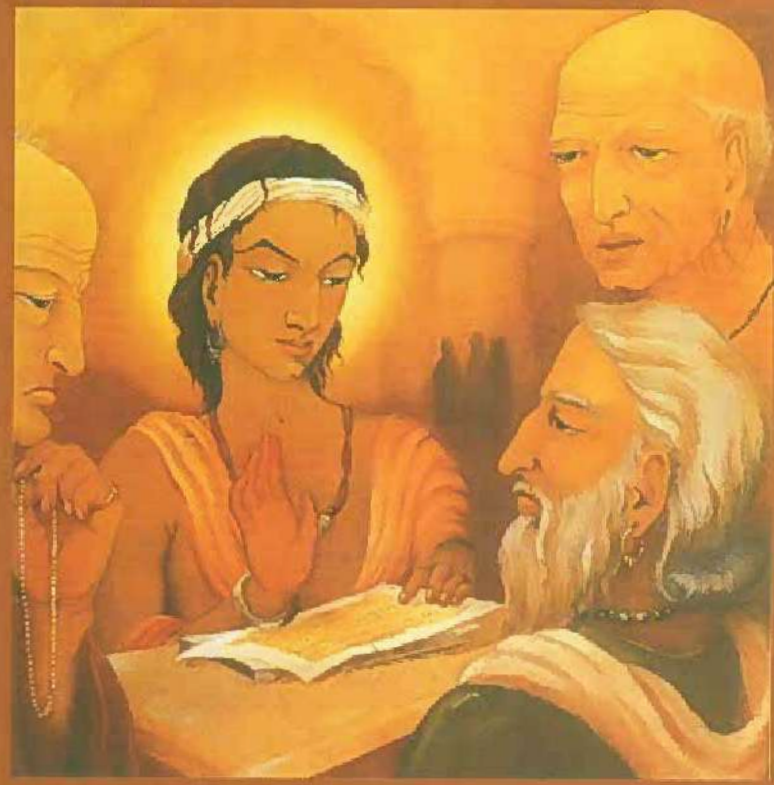
Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili, S.J.
Missionary, Scholar and Saint in 17th Century India



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Preface to the Indian Edition

When we published in 2000 this collection of three treatises by Roberto de Nobili, we did so with the conviction that his importance would be well understood and his heritage properly assessed only by those familiar with his writings – and not just with his image, albeit a remarkable one, as a holy man, pioneer in dialogue, amazingly erudite intercultural scholar. The need to make his works available, so that what he actually thought would become clear, was particularly the case with respect to his Tamil writings – none of which, remarkably, had been published in translation before our 2000 volume. Once the book was in print, we were all the more confident that researchers and teachers both could now have in hand fresh and important primary sources. (We still acknowledge, of course, our debt to Fr. S. Rajamanickam, who many years ago printed de Nobili's Tamil works and the *Report on Indian Customs* that in a revised version made up a major portion of our book.)

This first Indian edition of *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* is all the more appropriate, for several reasons. First, it makes these important writings of de Nobili easily available in India, and we hope that a wide audience of Jesuits, Catholics, and all those interested in the history of Christianity in India and its intercultural exchange with the West, will take advantage of this new publication.

Second, it is timely that we reconsider de Nobili and his heritage in the years 2005 and 2006, which mark respectively the 400th anniversaries of his arrival in India, and of his arrival in Madurai where he was to spend most of the rest of his life. As we finish our work on this new Indian edition, the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions and the de Nobili Research Centre at Loyola College, Chennai, are sponsoring a conference to mark the anniversaries. We are confident that the conversations and new insights put forward at that seminar nicely enrich and are complemented by the examples of de Nobili's thought and work contained in this book.

A retrospective after so long a time is of course a challenging task; we cannot simply read these works as directly relevant, for better or worse, today. A great deal has happened over the past 400 years, of course, and the religious and political situation has changed greatly. How this is so will become evident to anyone reading the following pages carefully. We cannot say now that we would or should act exactly like Roberto de Nobili, so admirable a pioneer; we expect that Indians of all backgrounds will interpret his heritage differently than would his contemporaries or even our recent predecessors in the 20th century; and we should not assume, of course, that *he* would write and act the same way were he working in India today. But the old sentiment is true: unless we learn from history, we will merely repeat it.

We are grateful to John W. Padberg, S. J., and Martin O'Keefe, S. J., at the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis, for enabling the original publication of our book in 2000, and for their kind permission for the production of this second, Indian edition in 2005.

Anand Amaladass, SJ
Satya Nilayam, Chennai

Francis X. Clooney, SJ
Harvard University

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Part One

Understanding De Nobili
Missionary, Scholar and Saint in 17th Century India

Introduction

Roberto de Nobili has long been admired as a courageous pioneer, most able scholar of Indian culture, brilliant expositor of mission theory, and enabler of the encounter of cultures. Our goal in *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* is to make him known to a wider audience by offering translations of three of his writings, the *Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation*, the *Dialogue on Eternal Life*, and the *Inquiry into the Meaning of "God,"* the latter two published in translation here for the first time. In this introduction we place his life and work in context.

I. A Brief Biographical Sketch of Roberto de Nobili

In *His Star in the East*, the best biography we have of de Nobili, Augustine Saulière suggests that we divide de Nobili's life into four parts. The first is the period of youth and preparation. de Nobili was born in Rome in 1577. He entered the Society in 1597, was ordained in 1603, and arrived in Goa, the capital of Portuguese India, in 1605. After some time he traveled south from there and finally reached Madurai in 1606, where another Jesuit, Gonçalo Fernandes, was already working.

In the second period, 1607-1612, de Nobili developed and put into practice the methods of adaptation for which he is justly famous. He simplified his dress, diet, and lifestyle and sought to follow the ascetic lifestyle of a Hindu renunciant. He hoped in this way to make his spiritual mission clear, win the attention of his desired audience, and remove the impression that Christianity was merely a foreign, Western religion. He learned Sanskrit,[1] the classical language of Hindu India, and also Tamil, a very ancient and important south Indian vernacular and studied religious texts in both languages. He used this learning to establish contacts within

[1] Although we do not have any definite examples of his Sanskrit writings.

the Hindu community and to win over converts, beginning in 1607. It was probably during this time that he wrote the *Dialogue on Eternal Life* and the *Inquiry into the Meaning of "God,"* the two Tamil-language treatises translated in this volume.[2]

It seems that from the start other missionaries had doubts about de Nobili's positive attitude toward Indian culture, but it was only in the third period, 1612-23, that controversy about his methods became heated and intense and he had to defend himself against his critics. During much of this period he was forbidden to accept converts according to the culturally-sensitive form of Christianity he had devised. He spent much time engaged in argument with fellow Jesuits, members of other religious orders, and ecclesial authorities in India and Rome. The controversy was not entirely without benefit, since it occasioned his articulation of the rationale for his missionary theory in three Latin treatises, the *Apology*,[3] the *Narration*,[4] and *Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation,* the last of which we include here.

The fourth period began with the definitive papal approval of his methods in 1623. According to Saulière this is the period of expansion, in which de Nobili built up the Madurai mission and was also able to travel to other parts of south India and Sri Lanka to establish new mission centers. During this period he wrote his great *Refutation of Calumnies* (*Tūṣaṇa Tikkāram*), a thorough defense of the Christian teaching and way of life, and his multi-volume *Catechism*. At the end of this period his health was in severe decline and gradually he became blind; he was much

[2] On the chronology of his works, see *The First Oriental Scholar.* Here and throughout this introduction we use the term "Hindu" as a convenient shorthand for a large set of complex religious traditions in India, and without implying that there is a single set of beliefs and practices which define the lives, beliefs, and practices of all "Hindus." de Nobili himself did not use the term "Hindu," but referred rather to the "Indians," "gentiles," "heathens," etc.

[3] The full title is *A response to the objections which have been raised against the method which the new Madurai mission uses for converting the natives.*

[4] The full title is *A narration of the foundations on which the Madurai mission was founded and on which it stands.*

diminished physically by the time of his death in 1656 near the modern city of Chennai (Madras).

II. An Overview of the Three Works

The study of de Nobili has generally focused on his Latin treatises, the *Apology*, the *Narration*, and the *Report*. In these works de Nobili defended himself against critics who thought he was too favorable to pagan customs. He explained the crucial distinction between religion and culture, and argued for the distinction between the essentials of Christian faith and the cultural trappings of European Christianity. He had the imagination to see the parallel between the Roman Church's arrival in India in the 16th century and the vast process of adaptation in which the first Christians had found themselves in the Roman empire. By analogy, he said, the Church in India could cultivate the same maximal openness to culture even while firmly rejecting religious ideas and practices incompatible with the Christian faith. These Latin treatises justly establish de Nobili as a genuine pioneer among mission theorists; we have included in this volume the third and longest, the *Report*.[5]

But these relatively well-known Latin treatises represent only a portion of de Nobili's literary legacy and do not give us a sense of the message he actually directed to the Indian and Hindu readers who were, after all, his primary audience. His writings in an Indian vernacular, Tamil, of which the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry* are excellent examples, allow us to glimpse his message to his intended readers. In these Tamil writings, we can glimpse his theory in practice, as he strove to present his message in a "de-Europeanized" form able to attract learned Hindu readers and challenge them to think seriously about religious truths and values. The *Dialogue* and *Inquiry* exemplify how an early Jesuit applied his basic philosophical and theological principles and social analysis (such as was outlined in the *Report*) in a new context far

[5] *Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs*, published by S. Rajamanickam, S.J. Although it was published in translation 30 years ago, it has been largely unavailable to readers, especially outside India. But it will still be valuable, since it includes the Latin text, omitted here.

removed from their European place of origin. De Nobili's effort to understand Indian ideas and practices theologically was confident and intellectually admirable, and these works show us the intellectual vigor with which he encountered the wider world. They also show the limits of his understanding and his lack of empathy with indigenous Hindu theological categories.

In the *Report, Dialogue*, and *Inquiry*, de Nobili took a long view, relying confidently on the fundamental reasonableness innate in human nature. He rejected what he considered to be the hasty tactics of missionaries eager to preach the Gospel immediately without preparation. In a 1606 letter de Nobili complains, "... I take this opportunity to remark on the opinion of certain zealous men who disapprove of our manner of preaching the Gospel to the pagans and who accuse us of being too indulgent, too reserved, not preaching in the manner of the apostles, that instead we are taking recourse to political ruses and a worldly prudence. It seems that they mean that we should, right from the start, attack the temples and the superstitious beliefs of these people. I respect their zeal, but I believe that they fool themselves and experience fully convinces me of this."[6] de Nobili next cites a description of the methods of Thomas the Apostle, which serves well to characterize his own approach:

> To attack [pagan] prejudices frontally would arouse hatred and persecution, close their spirits to the truth, arousing their passions and provoking their opinionatedness. Baronius speaks very well to this subject: Do not be surprised if the apostles, at the beginning of their preaching, did not declaim with vehemence against the divinities of the pagans. The recommendation of Exodus is, "Do not speak against the gods." This applies in the same way to the deities of the gentiles; it is not that these false divinities are not worthy of all opprobrium, but rather that this means, far from producing any fruit, impedes the conversion of souls. Metaphrastes, speaking about St. Thomas, the apostle of the Indies, wrote these remarkable words, "Seeing that the cult of demons exercised its empire over these people and that it was deeply rooted in their spirits, the holy apostle did not press his attack and refute these errors, he did not have recourse to severe reprimands, he did not seek in rigor a remedy for this evil; he knew that it is difficult to destroy impressions and ideas that habit has at length strengthened and so to speak even identified with our souls; gentle persuasion is more able than violence to change them.' When we wish to chase the darkness from a room we do not waste time in making a taper in order to expel it little by little, but we light a torch and the darkness dissipates itself. So too with regard to the pagans: penetrate their hearts and win their esteem and affection. So carry the torch of truth, and all the shadows of idolatry will dissipate without difficulty."[7]

[6] From a letter to his cousin Constantia, Duchessa of Sora (December 6, 1606, Shembaganur Archives # 56).

Such is the basic attitude de Nobili brings to his missionary work and writings. The *Report, Dialogue*, and *Inquiry* therefore present complementary angles on a very interesting and controversial experiment which took place at a meeting point of the Hindu and Christian religions, European and Indian cultures.

1. *The Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation*

The *Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation (Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicae)* was written by de Nobili as early as 1613. With the approval of Francisco Ros, Archbishop of Cranganore, it was sent to the Jesuit General Claudio Acquaviva in 1615. The *Report* defends de Nobili's missionary methods against those who criticized his methods and even questioned his learning and the judgments about religion and culture he based on that learning.

The *Report* is divided into eleven chapters: 1. a description of the social structures of the Indian state according to civil law; 2. arguments in support of the view that the brahmins, by reason of

[7] See Bertrand, vol. II, 264-265. de Nobili is quoting Caesar Baronius (1538-1607), author of the *Annales Ecclesiastici*, who in turn is quoting an earlier account of Thomas.

their social rank and specific office, constitute the particular class of the learned; 3. the sciences which the brahmins pursue professionally; 4. the brahmin sects assessed from a religious standpoint; 5. the priesthood of Indian nation; 6. certain customs connected with the brahmin caste; 7. thread, the distinctive mark of the brahmins; 8. the tuft of hair, called the *kutumi*; 9. two other debated customs, the wearing of sandal paste and the scholar's mark; 10. rules which should guide missionaries in adopting and making judgments about India's social customs; 11. the necessity of sanctioning customs prevalent in India, insofar as they are purely social.[8] The *Report* is a rich source of information on Indian society and religion in de Nobili's time, and is one of the very earliest accounts of Hinduism that has come down to us.

The *Report* is also akin to a lawyer's brief, learned and powerfully argued. de Nobili cited numerous texts to support his view that Indian culture can be distinguished from Indian religion. He gave special recognition to texts which had legal weight, and most importantly to the *Laws of Manu* which were widely thought to exemplify the values widely shared in elite society. There were of course numerous specific customs of great importance to particular groups in society, but these customs were generally understood against the background of the norms set forth in the *Laws of Manu*.[9]

de Nobili's most important judgment is proposed in chapter 4 of the *Report* and defended throughout the rest of the treatise: there is a basic, fundamentally civil and non-religious level to Indian society which can be distinguished from superstitious and idolatrous elements. The culture is good and acceptable, and must be respected by both foreign missionaries and Indians who convert.

8 Complete outline of the *Report, Dialogue*, and *Inquiry* are found at the beginning of each translation, respectively.

9 Most modern scholars would find it problematic to honor *Manu* as the authority for the secular nature of Indian society. The text has many religious elements as well as an overall narrative structure to which de Nobili does not refer. For a recent assessment of the *Laws of Manu*, see Doniger and Smith.

One can continue to appreciate and value the culture without becoming entangled in its superstitions.

de Nobili says that Indian society includes three basic groups of intellectuals: atheists, idolaters dedicated to specific sectarian beliefs in honor of specific gods, and the "wise," those who seek a true, reasonable, and non-idolatrous religion. The atheists are the Buddhists,[10] whom de Nobili judges to be the oldest of these intellectual communities in India since every other school knows of them and attacks them. After the Buddhists, he says, there arose schools of idolaters who indulge in all the superstitions and mischief de Nobili and his ideal interlocutors seem to oppose, but also, more importantly, the *gnani*,[11] the "wise." These are the people with deep learning, who desire a true, reasonable, and non-idolatrous religion. Throughout the *Report* de Nobili describes the sect of the wise as a learned, socially respected group of scholars, who are open to reasonable conversation, and whose erudition can be drawn upon without fear of the taint of idolatry. These wise men are the people who mirror de Nobili's own values (excepting truths specific to Christian revelation), and it is to them that he directed his writings.[12]

Confidence in reasoning, the distinction between the social and the religious, and the appeal to the learned in society: these values and principles enunciated in the *Report* motivated the *Dialogue on Eternal Life* and the *Inquiry into the Meaning of "God."* If the *Report* states the strategy guiding de Nobili's work, the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry* show us de Nobili in action, traversing and teaching this intellectual path toward the Gospel.

10 Like other early European scholars of Indian thought, de Nobili knew nothing about the content of Buddhist teachings. In calling them atheists he echoes the Hindu polemic against Buddhist teachings.

11 de Nobili's Latin, from the Sanskrit word *jñāna*, "knowledge," and *jñaāni*, "one who has knowledge."

12 This community of the "wise," rich in natural wisdom and largely untainted by religious sectarianism, is in a certain sense de Nobili's own invention, much as "Confucianism" was a construction of the Jesuits in China. On the latter, see Jensen. There is no evidence that de Nobili influenced the way Brahmins thought of themselves.

2. *The Dialogue on Eternal Life*

We have no firm date for the *Dialogue on Eternal Life*, but it seems to have been among de Nobili's earliest writings in Tamil, possibly as early as 1610.[13] Written in a form of a dialogue between a teacher (*guru*) and his disciple (*śiṣya*), the *Dialogue* offers a well-reasoned and clear presentation of some key presuppositions for a faith that is both intelligent and moral. It may have been an idealized version of actual conversations, intended to encourage brahmins, in de Nobili's eyes the intellectuals and scholars of authentic Hinduism, to enter into conversation with him. Secondarily, it may also have been intended to provide less well-prepared missionaries with ideas and arguments by which to debate brahmins.

The *Dialogue* aims at applying established theological principles (largely Thomistic) in the entirely new context of south Indian religion and culture, so as to achieve logical clarity regarding how religion ought to be understood and practiced. It is divided into nine conversations between the teacher and his disciple. The first four propose basic principles, and the last five apply them in the Indian context: 1. the hierarchy of truths and knowledge of God; 2. ways of knowing and their limits; 3. verbal knowledge and revelation; 4. the idea of the one true Veda; 5. criteria for determining the true Veda; the problem of atheism; 6. elemental idolatry; 7. the four major reasons for idol worship; 8. idol worship (continued); 9. idols and symbols.

The *Dialogue* makes four basic arguments. First, reason has an important role in human life and in knowledge of religious topics and of God, but there are truths beyond the capacity of the mind to grasp on its own, or even to grasp at all. Second, reason must be complemented by revelation, which is made known by the compassionate and loving God who desires that people know the truth, live morally, and be saved. Third, it is crucial for people to

[13] Fr. Anthony de Proença, de Nobili's first biographer, refers to the *Dialogue* as the first of de Nobili's writings. in *The First Oriental Scholar* (p. 118) Rajamanickam observes, however, that the *Dialogue* itself refers to an earlier work.

know which "revelation" is the true one taught by the lord, and which are false, merely apparent revelations. In part at least, this discernment can be made by determining which religious ideas meet the test of clear reasoning. Fourth, an impartial examination of the available data regarding the Indian religions, especially the majority Hindu religion, indicates that they do not meet the test of a rationally plausible and morally edifying religion. Everyone who is willing to think clearly will agree that Hinduism is not a religion that satisfies reasonable people.

3. *The Inquiry into the Meaning of "God"*

The *Inquiry into the Meaning of "God"* is a much briefer work, elegant in its clear and succinct theological formulations and applications, and striking for a polemic even more relentless than that of the *Dialogue*. The title simply reflects its opening words — *kaṭavul* (God) and *niṇṇayam* (inquiry), an inquiry about "God." S. Rajamanickam suggests that the *Inquiry* may have been written during the same time period as the *Dialogue*, and that it too is intended to gain the attention of Hindu readers and draw them into further, explicitly catechetical instruction.[14]

If the *Dialogue* is focused on identifying the true revelation and the adequate description of God appropriate to that revelation, the *Inquiry* argues that the idolatrous Indian traditions do not show us deities who possess the key features which must belong to the true God. Six such features are suggested near the beginning of the work: "I adore always the first cause, 1) the Lord of all, 2) who is self-existing, 3) without beginning, 4) without a body, 5) by nature possessed of all good qualities, and 6) all-pervasive." In Chapters 4 to 6, de Nobili draws on the descriptions of Hindu deities found in popular mythology in order to demonstrate why these deities do not measure up to the standard set by the six defining features. Chapter 7 introduces six rejoinders to de Nobili's position, which he vigorously refutes. He concludes with a brief Chapter 8 which states the Ten Commandments and is meant to mark the beginning of the catechesis de Nobili expects to follow.

[14] *The First Oriental Scholar*, p. 126.

III. de Nobili in Context

The *Report, Dialogue* and *Inquiry* are emblematic of the mixture of intellectual focus, missionary zeal, and polemic which marks de Nobili's Latin and Tamil writings. Each work is a unified and forceful treatise, and we must admire his intellectual and literary achievements even if (as we shall suggest below) his apologetic is less convincing in retrospect than he thought it was. To assess his particular contribution, however, we first need to put his writing in context. In this section we therefore examine three key components which define his intellectual and cultural context: first, his theology's intellectual roots in Thomism; second, his encounter with indigenous Hindu learning; third, his missionary discourse, shared with other Jesuits, which applies the basic Thomistic principles.

1. de Nobili and the Thomistic Heritage: Reason, Morality, and the Critique of Idolatry

It is not startling to observe that the theology behind de Nobili's writings is thoroughly Thomistic. Since Aquinas's theology was favored in the early Society, it would have more surprising had de Nobili not shared the Thomistic theological views presumably basic to his education.[15] He occasionally cites Aquinas in the *Report,* and we will indicate in the notes to the *Dialogue* several passages where de Nobili's views seem particularly close to positions taken by Aquinas. On the whole, though, it is possible to detect the influence of Aquinas on almost every aspect of de Nobili's thinking; here it will suffice to specify three key ways in which he draws on the Thomistic heritage: first, reason as propaedeutic to revelation, including knowledge of God; second, the moral importance of proper religious thinking and submission to revelation; third, idolatry as the distinguishing mark of false religion.

[15] We do not currently have sufficient information on de Nobili's period of study at the Gregorian University to state with assurance that he studied the works of Aquinas directly. There are probably intervening thinkers whose versions of Thomism influenced de Nobili's view of idolatry, figures such as Francisco Suarez.

First, de Nobili affirms the real but limited role of reason in religious matters. By reason we can achieve adequate knowledge of some objects, which are appropriate to the human mind, and real though still inadequate knowledge of other objects of knowledge (such as the mystery of God)[16] which transcend the capacity of human knowing.[17] At the beginning of the *Summa contra Gentiles* Aquinas says that the work seeks to demonstrate reasonably "that truth which faith professes and reason investigates. This we shall do by bringing forth both demonstrative and probable arguments, some of which were drawn from the books of the philosophers and of the saints, through which truth is strengthened and its adversary overcome."[18] Aquinas goes on to distinguish between truths the mind can discover on its own and truths it cannot discover on its own but can grasp to some extent, if they are pointed out. God is qualitatively different from every other object of knowledge, but even God is in some way still knowable to us. Although reason cannot comprehend God, it can at least dispel ideas which contradict reason and revelation and obscure what humans can know of God. It is this clarificatory project which de Nobili carries forward in the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry.*

Aquinas's thorough analysis of the human knowing process explains perception, and also the conceptual knowledge which goes beyond sense data. At the limits of these kinds of knowing,

[16] In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas notes that the active as well as the passive intellect is confined to material things. In this life "we cannot know God directly in his essence, but only through creatures." (I.88.3)

[17] There are ample echoes of the doctrine about proper knowledge of God in the *Summa Theologiae*, but since Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* is a classic guide for the theory and development of Christian mission and was written in awareness of pagans who were not likely to respect revelation nor be persuaded by appeals to it, we will indicate with regard to that work how Aquinas' theory is operative in de Nobili's understanding of his mission.

[18] In the same place Aquinas adds that the plan of this *Summa* therefore is first "to make known that truth which faith professes and reason investigates [in Books I-III]... by bringing forth both demonstrative and probable arguments... Then... we shall proceed to make known that truth which surpasses reason answering the objections of its adversaries and setting forth the truth of faith by probable arguments and by authorities, to the best of our ability." (I.9.3)

the student must become receptive to the gift of divine illumination and thus by grace capable of higher knowledge.[19] de Nobili proposes this balance of reasoning and the submission of reason to higher truths in the first three chapters of the *Dialogue*. Both the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry* expect that attentive listeners — the "wise" of the *Report* — will eventually admit a need beyond their capacities, and come seeking catechetical instruction. A wise teacher can demonstrate how far reason can lead an open-minded person in thinking about religion too, as students learn to make judgments about which religion seems most appropriate to what one can know of God.

A second way in which de Nobili is indebted to Aquinas is evident in their shared conviction that correct reasoning has moral implications, while faulty reasoning is intertwined with immorality. To think clearly and discover the truth, and then to receive it as revealed, has implications for how one is to live, and thus too for salvation. In our summaries of the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry* we have already shown that de Nobili emphasizes morality as a key arguing point in his conversation with Hindus. There is a direct path from wrong reasoning to immorality, and from immorality to damnation. It is therefore urgent that people understand religious and moral issues properly. A conversation truly based on reason offers more than an intellectual ideal; it also enhances moral behavior. Human reasoning is weakened by sin, and in practice is unlikely to be able to sort out right and wrong perfectly, but at least it can identify correct moral principles.

This view too can be traced to Aquinas. By reasoning one should be able to identify truths and their moral implications, he observes, but often people do not think clearly or follow through on their questions to the logical, right conclusions about what to think and do. Sometimes they do not want to know what is moral. People need help, and revelation functions as a great and

[19] In *Summa contra Gentiles* III.49-60 Aquinas inquires into how and to what extent created beings can see God. In III.53 he discusses the infusion of divine light — the *lumen gloriae* — in a way that is surely the basis for de Nobili's discussion of this light of glory in Chapter 2.8 of the *Dialogue*.

compassionate teacher regarding moral issues. In his treatment of law Aquinas observes: "...on account of the uncertainty of human judgment, especially on contingent and particular matters, different people form different judgments on human acts; whence also, different and contrary laws result. In order, therefore, that man may know without any doubt what he ought to do and what he ought to avoid, it was necessary for man to be directed in his proper acts by a law given by God, for it is certain that such a law cannot err." (*Summa Theologiae* II.I.91.4) It is therefore right, and urgent, that teachers lead people to the truth. They should rely on reason as far as possible, but also persuade them of the prudence of relying on revelation. The teacher — de Nobili's missionary — is an instrument of this compassionate aid from God. Although the message should be as rational as possible, the underlying urgency is to save listeners not only from ignorance but also from moral depravity and therefore from damnation.[20]

The third point we wish to highlight regarding the affinity of de Nobili and Aquinas pertains to Aquinas's critique of idolatry. According to the Thomistic system idolatry is a quintessential failing. It is irrational, a misapprehension of the divine, and immoral too. If one does not reason clearly, then one will adhere to a defective notion of God; thereafter, one will almost inevitably lapse into immoral practices which fit that defective theology. Idolatry is examined in *Summa Theologiae* II.II.94, in the context of a consideration of superstition. Aquinas's analysis is itself part of a longer tradition reaching back to St. Augustine's *City of God,* and from there back to the Biblical *Book of Wisdom*, Chapters 13-15, which theorized about the rise of idolatry. In this tradition, idolatry is thought of primarily as a mistake committed by individuals and whole societies, when they mistakenly transfer to lesser beings the worship due solely to God. Aquinas mentions

[20] Even de Nobili's claim in the *Dialogue* that the denial of God's existence is really a convenient cover for immorality echoes Aquinas' comments on Mohammed in *Summa contra Gentiles* I.6.4, where Aquinas says that the obviously spurious arguments for Mohammed's new religion were merely a cover for his immoral activities. Wrong ideas can lead to immorality, and in its shame and self-interest, immorality encourages wrong thinking.

three kinds of idolatry in *Summa Theologiae* II.II.94.1. First, by the power of demons some idols produce seemingly miraculous effects and thus gain a popular following; this is what was traditionally called "civil" idolatry. Second, idolatry also arises when men are worshipped as gods, their status enhanced by all kinds of inventive mythology; this is called "fabulous" idolatry. Third, there is "natural" or "theological" idolatry, in which one worships the world itself, as if God is the world soul, or worships demi-gods thought to be present in the individual elements of nature. Aquinas then speculates on the origins of idolatry, and again follows *The Book of Wisdom.* He highlights ignorance, immorality, and socio-political factors, such as the arrogance of kings and the grief of parents. Although demons promote of idolatry, idolatry is most basically caused by undue attachment to objects.[21]

de Nobili drew heavily on Aquinas's analysis of idolatry in evaluating the religions of India. As we mentioned earlier, in the latter chapters of the *Dialogue* de Nobili identifies four kinds of idolatry (stones as gods, gods in stones, stone images of gods, propitiation of God as is present in idols), and four explanations for it (power, sorrow, amazement, affection). While de Nobili gave some indications that he was aware of the more sophisticated Hindu understandings of image worship, for the most part he simply applied in India the model already worked out by Aquinas. This model of idolatry — as mistake, as misunderstanding — usefully confirmed de Nobili's preferred approach to missionary work; even idolatry will give way to more reasonable forms of religion, once people are properly educated.

An appreciation of the impact of de Nobili's reliance on Aquinas is crucial to understanding the *Dialogue*, *Inquiry,* and *Report.* Because de Nobili believed that Thomistic principles made it possible to decipher and evaluate south Indian religions by a clear, rational standard, he thought that he could and should correlate and harmonize Indian and European epistemological and metaphysical categories, which he believed must ultimately be the

[21] See II.II.94.4, response to the third objection.

same. On that basis he felt he could show that proper religious thinking could be shared across cultural boundaries, regardless of differences. de Nobili believed that Thomism allowed him to understand Hinduism better than did the Hindus themselves. Deficient notions of religion could be cleared up, and the door opened to the Gospel and the faith. Indians could benefit from his Thomistic arguments, and by learning to think more clearly come to understand their own culture more clearly too. The way to implement his ambitious program, of course, was not to preach Aquinas to the Indians, but rather use a Thomistic mode of inquiry — questions and answers — coupled with an empirical analysis of the data of society and religion in south India. Aided by Thomistic reasoning, Hindus would become better disposed to Christian faith.

As a theologian deeply steeped in a Thomistic theological worldview. de Nobili knew, even before ever meeting a south Indian Hindu, that reason would provide a common ground for discussion, that there is an enduring good, natural base to Indian culture. The religious differences between Hindus and Christians were due to the rational and moral deficiencies of the former and to the fact that Christians, though likewise prone to error, had been corrected by God's grace working in the Church. His openness to the new culture and religions is real, but it is selective, already confined within the boundaries of Thomistic concepts, words, and methods.

2. de Nobili's Encounter with South Indian Culture and Hinduism

The second area we wish to highlight is how de Nobili's thinking was affected by his encounter with Indian culture and religion, particularly south Indian Hinduism, and how this encounter shaped his ongoing communication with Hindus and guided him in identifying his audience. We can presume that he was deeply affected by his many years in south India, and it is obvious that he also expended intense effort in observing the culture around him and studying the wisdom of the Hindu traditions. Although he was a dedicated Thomist who was convinced that he already knew the basic truths of human nature, and a dedicated Christian who believed that he already possessed

all truths necessary for salvation, de Nobili was also dedicated to the search for whatever wisdom might be found in Indian culture and religion. He believed that he could find evidence of impressive human achievements, right behavior, and spiritual insight even among these people who, until now, had also been worshipping idols and walking paths of error.

At every step, though, de Nobili also moved deeper into this new culture and religious context, acquiring new images, ideas, and vocabulary in which he attempted to express freshly, and yet as before, the truths of the Christian faith.[22] The *Report, Dialogue*, and *Inquiry* show that his perception of Hinduism and explanation of Christian truths were heavily indebted to key categories of brahmanical thought. He was comfortable with the idea of *dharma*, a right order of reality which included both the natural and social realms. He agreed with the Hindu philosophers that perception, inference, and verbal knowledge are the three primary means of knowing. He even agreed that the Veda is the sacred revelation which gives higher salvific knowledge (although he thought that the Bible was the Veda Indians were actually seeking). Even his idea that Indian intellectuals could be divided into three groups — the atheists, the idolaters, the wise — echoed traditional doxographies which ranked schools of religious thought in terms of their apprehension of the fullness of truth. To identify the "wise" as more important than marginal groups (such as Buddhists) and mere religious functionaries (such as temple priests) echoed the learned brahmins' view of themselves. We can assume that they would be content with his assessment of the hierarchy within the culture, since they found themselves at the top of that ranking.

As noted, de Nobili's principles were largely in place before he came to India, but he was seriously concerned to verify these truths through observation. He sought confirmation for his views in textual sources, erudite conversations, and in the observation of popular beliefs and practices. He synthesized these elements in his

[22] See Bror Tiliander on the general project and problem of expressing Christian ideas in Tamil. On how south Indian Hinduism might have affected de Nobili, see Clooney 1988.

overall formulation of a view of India and Hinduism. In the *Report* he draws on his considerable knowledge of texts, and also seeks to guarantee the validity of his interpretations by calling as witnesses brahmins from different parts of India, whose names are listed in an appendix to the *Report*.

Even when de Nobili is working out a general theory about religion and culture, his arguments are usually very detailed, based on the citation of specific texts and references to specific local beliefs. In the *Report*, he quotes repeatedly and extensively from the *Laws of Manu*, and mentions (at *Report* 9.3.1) that he knows the text virtually by heart. At *Report* 4.4.3 he cites one of the ancient Upanishads, the *Taittirīya*, and finds in it an inkling of the mystery of the Trinity. At *Report* 4.2 he cites the first verse of the *Civajñānacittiyar*, an important Śaiva text, judging it consonant with the Christian understanding of the one true God. In the *Dialogue* he does not quote texts, but he does mention several texts and authors by name: the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the traditional texts known as *Āgamas*, the famous teacher Vyāsa, the non-dualist theologian Śaṅkara, the devotional Vaiṣṇava poets known as the āḻvārs, and the chief āḻvār work, *Tiruvāymoḻi*. He is also familiar with local versions of religious myths, and clearly has observed some religious practices and heard a great deal about others. He refers a number of times to the *Rāmāyana*, the great and immensely popular narrative of the trials and triumphs of Rāma and Sītā. His references to Śaiva mythology rely on local beliefs. He was willing to learn from every available source.

It would be a mistake to assume that de Nobili knew only what he cites, but we must still admit that his probable store of information does not add up to a full portrait of Hinduism in south India. He was not disposed to take seriously the indigenous accounts of how information and theory might be best combined. From the start he was convinced that his position had to be right and that the local Hindu positions, wherever contradictory to his theory of right religion, had to be wrong and therefore, also according to his theory, superfluous. In all his studies he was attempting to document his theological views with data drawn from the local context, and was interested mainly in a strategic use

of details to get his points across. Throughout, he gives no evidence of having sympathized deeply with any of these myths, texts, or practices he considered. We must assume that while he learned much, he missed much too, regarding significant detail and the proper interconnections among the details.

Given his worldview (where learning from other religions was inconceivable) and his vocabulary (where words like "religion" and "Hinduism" were not available), "learning from Hinduism" was not a viable prospect, and it was not possible for him to admit that he had been learning from Hinduism. Nevertheless, one can step back and observe just how well his version of Christianity was attuned to aspects of the Indian context. It was a wisdom for the wise, given by the divine guru come into the world; it was a sacred teaching religiously passed down by generations of holy teachers, yet accessible to any reasoning person. Although de Nobili's own rhetoric suggests that this presentation was tailored to attract listeners who later on could be given a fuller exposition of Catholic doctrines, we can also imagine that he himself had internalized these Indian ways of thinking. A disciple of Christ and Christian missionary, he became a guru whose particular mission was preaching wisdom to the wise.

Since de Nobili was primarily interested in communication with the Hindus of his day, it is also important to consider the likely reception by Hindu readers of the theories expounded in the *Report* and implied in the *Dialogue* and *Inquiry*. Who was likely to be won over by his approach and his account of Hinduism? Christian sources indicate that he impressed many Hindus and had fair success in winning many over to the Gospel. But the approach taken in the *Dialogue* and *Inquiry* would surely have been received unfavorably by most. Some would not have understood his insistence on connecting clear thinking and logic with the idea of changing one's religion; Some would have been hostile to his approach, particularly the proponents of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, whose devotees worship Viṣṇu (and Viṣṇu as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa) as the supreme God. On some levels Vaiṣṇava theology is consonant with de Nobili's theology: e.g., regarding the necessary and proper features of God, the value of a rational inquiry into what one

believes, and the importance of clear moral norms. But there are major differences which would also make communication very difficult. Vaiṣṇavism is not willing to concede that we can know anything certain about God prior to revelation; its theologians do not presuppose a natural knowledge of God which could serve as a common ground for dialogue. Faith must precede reasoning in regard to all theological topics. One must first learn from Scripture and conform one's reasoning to it in order thereafter to reflect properly on truths accessible to the mind. Nor would Vaiṣṇavas expect that an outsider, newly come to India, would really be capable of understanding the rich combination of piety, practice and theory which constitute the Vaiṣṇava positions. They would most likely have concluded that de Nobili simply did not understand enough to be taken seriously.[23] On the whole, de Nobili's approach makes it inevitable that he would disagree in substance and method with the Vaiṣṇavas, perhaps even to the point of a stark failure in communication. But he would have attributed this failure not to enduring religious differences or to any deficiencies in his own knowledge or style, but rather to their lack of clear thinking and their failure to follow through on what they learned.[24]

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[23] The Vaiṣṇavas would probably not have been much impressed with the kind of reasoning underlying de Nobili's critique of idolatry and his view that the divine descents of Vishnu into the world in the form of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, etc. were implausible and immoral diminishments of the divine. To them it might seem that he was merely reading the wrong texts, or had spoken with the wrong informants and so did not understand the meaning of the myths. The deeds of the divine descent, if properly understood, are always honorable, neither immoral nor irrational; such descents restore morality and defeat evil; just as importantly, the descents give humans the opportunity to view the divine person directly, opportunities to enjoy the divine presence. Divine descent is not only a moral deed, it is also an aesthetic experience and an experience of the sacred.

[24] Perhaps it was with Vaiṣṇavas that he experienced the frustration which prompted this lament: "For the present, my occupation is to make myself perfect in their language; the rest of the time I treat with those Gentiles to show them the folly and perversity of their faith, which it is not difficult to prove. I may assure your excellency that when I have argued with them they declare themselves convinced, but all do not answer the call. They go away more confused than converted. I hope however for the mercy of our Lord, that

His relationship with the devotees of Śiva — the Śaivas — was different. de Nobili's intention was primarily to attract, challenge, and win over not the "atheists" or the "idolaters," but rather the "wise," since these are the learned Hindus who could become allies against what he considered the inconsistencies and absurdities of popular, traditional Hindu beliefs. de Nobili seems to have idealized the Śaiva theologians as the prime candidates for the title of "wise," as the most open of the Hindu intellectual elite and already most free from the weight of superstition. These wise men are described very positively in the *Report*, and the *Dialogue* seems to appeal particularly to their beliefs as developed in their systematic theology, the Śaiva Siddhānta.

The Śaiva Siddhānta theologians agreed that certain religious truths can be known by reason. Reflection on the finitude of the world proves that there must be a creator, Shiva. He is supreme and perfect in every way, unconstricted by the limitations to which finite beings are subject. Essentially good by nature, Shiva graciously cares for the world, uplifting and enlightening human beings. All his activities with regard to the world are edifying, and in no way do his activities compromise his divinity. The Śaiva theologians consider other religious paths flawed and in various ways degraded. A study of their teachings is sure to confirm that the Śaiva way is the superior way intended by God.[25]

de Nobili seeks to build on the common ground he shares with these theologians who are essentially intellectual monotheists. As mentioned above, in the *Report* he cites the first verse of the classic of Śaiva Siddhānta, *Civajñānacittiyar*, a verse which testifies to a strong faith in one supreme God. The *Dialogue* is probably an

He will not permit our labors to be in vain..." [From a letter to his cousin Constantia, Duchessa of Sora (December 6, 1606, Shembaganur Archives # 56).] Only their confusion could explain their unwillingness to be persuaded by his excellent reasoning.

25 For an exposition of Śaiva Siddhānta theology, see Dhavamony. Like de Nobili, Dhavamony thinks that Śaiva Siddhānta represents the highest achievement of Indian religion — i.e., that its positions are strikingly similar to Christian theological positions.

earnest invitation to Śaivas to listen and participate in further, eventually catechetical conversations.[26]

To some extent, de Nobili seems to have been successful in engaging Śaivas and opening the way to further discussion with them. In one of his letters de Nobili described his long conversation with Śaiva theologians on a variety of theological topics, beginning with questions related to the creation of the world.[27] In a letter to Fr. Acquaviva, the General Superior of the Order, on Nov. 20, 1609, Fr. Albert Laerzio, Malabar Provincial, quotes a letter in which de Nobili refers to a prolonged conversation with a Śaiva scholar which culminated in the scholar's conversion to Christianity.[28]

Although de Nobili's rapprochement with the Śaivas is therefore likely to have been more fruitful than with the Vaiṣṇavas, it would be wrong to overestimate his common ground with them. Śaivas too would have been likely to disagree with him on the implications of positions they shared. For instance, although Śaivas too insist on the limitations and imperfections of lesser gods, they did not intend to deny the very existence of those gods, nor to claim that Śaivas should try to win over the adherents of other religions to the Śaiva viewpoint. Śaiva Siddhānta is a comprehensive tradition of theology and spiritual wisdom, but its proponents did not share de Nobili's evangelical impulses. They did not seek to convert others, nor were they likely to consider conversion a serious option for themselves.

26 For some additional points on the interrelation between Śaiva theology and de Nobili's thinking, see Clooney 1988.

27 The letter to N. Mascarenhas (Shembaganur Archives, # 378), November 12, 1627; in it he reports that he defeated the Śaiva scholars in debate, but they did not take the next logical step of seeking conversion.

28 See Bertrand, II, pp. 6-8.

3. de Nobili Compared with Other Jesuit Missionaries

de Nobili was not the first to take seriously the study of another culture. He shares methodology, concepts, and intent with other missionaries, both predecessors and contemporaries, in India and in other parts of the wider world Europeans were discovering. It is instructive to look briefly at this wider context, to highlight some of the continuities in the Jesuit missionary discourse which place de Nobili in a wider context but also bring to the fore something of his distinctive character and contribution. Here we offer brief comparisons with important predecessors outside of India, Alessandro Valignano and Mateo Ricci, and then with several of his contemporaries in India.[30]

a. The Broad Context of Jesuit Missionary Theory

Since Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) was the superior of the Jesuits in Asia in the last quarter of the 16th century and one of the most influential missionary figures in Asia in the generations before de Nobili, it would be surprising were de Nobili not influenced by his positions and directives on mission and religion. Here we indicate just several possible points of influence by referring to Valignano's *Catechism for the Japanese Church* (1580), a document written in Portuguese and then translated into Japanese.[31]

The purpose of the *Catechism* was to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, in part by refuting Japanese religion. It is divided into two books, each in a series of "conferences," the first book dealing with Christian teaching and the second with Christian living. In his preface Valignano explains the nature of human knowing in its intellectual and moral dimensions. It is necessary to begin with an exposition of the sects and laws of the Japanese, in order to make clear that the refutation of the Japanese doctrines and the

[30] We thus do not attempt even to sketch the larger scene of Catholic mission history, though a comprehensive study of de Nobili would profit from such a sketch.

[31] We rely here entirely on the summary of it given in Schutte, vol. II, pp. 67-89.

presentation of the Christian truths rest on clear proof.[32] In Book I Valignano then explains the nature of God and contrasts the proper Christian understanding with the popular and learned teachings of Japanese sects. In the first three conferences he presents and refutes learned Japanese teachings, particularly regarding the highest reality; in order to highlight the sharp contrast with Japanese teaching, he also summarizes the Christian view of the nature of God. In the fourth conference he criticizes the deceitful and immoral popular teachings of the bonzes (Buddhist priests), and explains why truth cannot be compromised even when one is teaching simple people. He goes on to consider the origins of idolatry, portraying it as a fall from original monotheism. In words similar to those which de Nobili would use in his explanation of idolatry in the *Dialogue*, Valignano writes: "In the course of time they transferred the attributes of supreme rule and power proper to God alone to things or persons in whom they observed those qualities in a heightened degree. Some worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars; others fire, water, air, earth, or other created things; others again paid divine honors to men because special gifts and talents betokened some divine quality in them; skill in the use of arms, for example, power, wisdom, knowledge, inventiveness, or great achievements in, say, navigation or medicine."[33] Valignano then lists other reasons, including excessive adulation of kings, the tendency of people to forget the human origins of the images they honor, and deliberate deception by devils. Valignano also believes that much idol worship is due to local customs tainted with various mistaken and contradictory beliefs. In his fifth conference he points out the moral depravity of the Japanese and traces this lamentable situation to idolatry and the wicked influence of the bonzes. Such evils stand in sharp contrast to the divine justice and divine retribution emphasized in the Christian religion.

Although de Nobili does not refer to the work of the devil or devils in the *Dialogue* and *Inquiry*, most of Valignano's suggested

[32] Schutte, volume II, p. 71.

[33] Pp. 81-82.

reasons for idolatry are echoed by de Nobili in chapters 6-9 of the *Dialogue*.[34] The sixth conference expounds the marks of the true religion, while the seventh and eighth set forth key Christian doctrines.[35] Most of these attitudes and arguments are echoed in de Nobili's writings. While such resemblances do not prove direct borrowing (since both Valignano and de Nobili would have read Aquinas), it is probable that de Nobili would have had some familiarity with the work of so important a predecessor as Valignano; he applied a particular Jesuit way of thinking in the south Indian context.

Mateo Ricci (1552-1610) is perhaps the most famous of the Jesuit missionaries in Asia after St. Francis Xavier. de Nobili is often paired with Ricci, as exemplifying the same ideal of adaptation to local culture. Although we cannot offer a comparison of their methods here,[36] we can affirm that Ricci shares with de Nobili the same rational confidence evident already in Valignano's works; the rightness of the Christian faith can be nearly recognized by reason, and likewise the deficiency of competing belief systems. Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, like de Nobili's *Dialogue*, is a conversation between a learned Christian and a well-educated native. Like the *Dialogue*, it proceeds with utter confidence that reasoning will lead to right conclusions, conducive to Christianity. Ricci's interlocutor too is exceedingly docile and agrees with almost everything that he is told by the Christian teacher. The arguments put forward by Ricci and de Nobili are quite different in detail. Idolatry seems to have been a bigger issue for de Nobili in India than for Ricci in China, although Ricci does give similar reasons for

[34] For a study of the theory of idolatry in the early colonial period, see Bernand and Gruzinski, who trace this missionary discourse on idolatry in the Central and South American contexts, beginning with the Dominican Bartolomeo Las Casas, and including Jose Acosta, S.J.

[35] Book II then treats the moral life of Christians.

[36] While there is large bibliography regarding Ricci and his companions in China, there is not, to my knowledge, any serious comparative study of Ricci and de Nobili as Jesuit intellectuals.

the rise of idolatry.[37] On the whole, Ricci and de Nobili have similar instincts about what needs to be said to a reasonable yet idolatrous audience, be it Chinese or Indian.

de Nobili's contribution in the *Report*, *Dialogue*, and *Inquiry* does not lie in the articulation of entirely new theories. He shared much with his Jesuit predecessors outside India, and like them he borrowed much from Aquinas. He is distinctive in his particular and extraordinary way of engaging south Indian Hindus and of adapting his message, and self-presentation as messenger, to fit the specific requirements of the Hindu context.[38]

b. de Nobili's Jesuit Contemporaries in India

Points of similarity can also be discovered if we look at the work of other Jesuit missionaries in the Indian context. Although de Nobili was the stellar example, he was only one of a number of Jesuits exploring Indian culture and religion. Others analyzed religion using vocabulary similar to his, and even before him missionaries had already started learning a great deal about Hindu mythology, writing treatises weaving together specific details of Hindu beliefs with Christian apologetics. Like de Nobili's, their treatises mixed description, assessments of the meaning and value of

[37] E.g., according to Ricci, ancient peoples built images of authority figures (who they may or may not ever have seen) and of departed ancestors for whom they felt affection. Some engaged in witchcraft and became respected and feared by the people who then made images in their honor. He notes that even if people seem to profit from the worship of idols, this is only the work of evil spirits.

[38] One might also look farther afield as important Jesuits working in other countries, e.g., Jose Acosta, Alexandre de Rhodes, and Desiderio Ippolito. Jose Acosta worked in Peru in the late 16th century, and de Nobili quotes him favorably in the *Response*. Acosta was one of the first scholars to articulate a theory of cultures to undergird the new worldwide missionary context. In his theorizing about idolatry he too is applying Aquinas. He also anticipates de Nobili in his belief that the people should be gradually and gently weaned away from their idolatry. For Acosta's theology and worldview, see Burgaleta. On Rhodes, who worked in Vietnam in the middle of the 17th century, see Phan; on Ippolito, who worked in Tibet in the 18th century, see Cameron, and Goss.

Indian religion, and vigorous arguments for the superiority of Christian beliefs. Here we introduce just three of the Jesuits who worked in India before or near the same time as de Nobili: Gonçalo Fernandes, Diego Gonsalvez, and Jacobo Fenicio.[39]

Gonçalo Fernandes, S.J. is often portrayed in an unfavorable light, due to his persistent opposition to de Nobili's missionary methods. But their disagreement, whatever its merits, was not due to a dismissal by Fernandes of the importance of studying the Indian traditions. His 1616 work, the *Tratado do P. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso Sobre O Hinduismo*, is an exhaustive description of brahmanical practices.[40] The *Tratado* is certainly well-informed; its second part is given over entirely to long citations from Sanskrit texts supportive of the positions Fernandes held regarding Indian culture and religion. These citations were probably collected and translated into Portuguese by those aiding Fernandes, who seems not to have known Sanskrit.[41] Indeed, it may be that Fernandes differs most importantly from de Nobili on this point. Fernandes had assistants collect his materials for him, rather than immersing himself personally in the study of Hinduism. The *Tratado* is primarily informational, and appears to be only propaedeutic to theological conclusions. Fernandes's real intent may have been to call into question de Nobili's distinction between Indian religion and Indian culture; he argued that de Nobili had misinterpreted the Indian tradition, in which religion and culture are inseparable and therefore must be criticized together. Fernandes implies that converts must break with the culture as well as with the religion, and must make major changes in their social and cultural practices when they

[39] In his introduction Charpentier offers a detailed though admittedly not comprehensive listing of the Jesuit writings in India in the 16th and early 17th century.

[40] Fernandez's *Tratado* has been edited and published by Jose Wicki, S.J.

[41] But Rajamanickam disagrees with Wicki's attribution of the text to Fernandez, arguing that although Fernandez signed the copy sent to Rome, the *Tratado* was actually composed by a convert named Boniface (Saulière, p. 499).

convert. This was, of course, a view quite opposed to de Nobili's position argued in the *Report*.

Diego Gonsalvez, S.J., worked in Quilon in the southwest part of India. In 1615 he published in Portuguese the *Historia do Malauar, comecando do Cabo do comorim ate Batecalor*. This work combined theology and the study of Indian culture and religion more explicitly than did Fernandes's *Tratado*.[42] The *Historia* begins with three chapters describing Hindu beliefs and practices. The first chapter gives background on the situation in India, government and law; the second describes religious law, ritual practices and festivals, some myths;[43] the third comments on moral issues, e.g., rules regarding marriage and the dangers of consuming alcohol and tobacco.

Its fourth and final chapter undertakes a theological examination of true and false religion. Gonsalvez poses questions which invite the articulation of basic theological principles: what must one believe about God and salvation? what are the criteria for discerning authentic supernatural revelation? what presuppositions should serve as first principles in arguments with pagans? He then offers a series of arguments about true and false religion. Reason tells us that there is only one God and one true religion. The Indian doctrine in favor of three primary Gods (Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva) is false. Hindus errs regarding the means to salvation and regarding prayer. The Christian faith is God's true religion, and the only one that deserves to be followed. This is so even if it is possessed of fewer followers because it is more demanding. Gonsalvez then offers criteria for the true religion: it contains no falsehoods; it makes its followers holy and truthful; it is confirmed by true miracles; it survives and

[42] We have not had the opportunity to see the *Historia,* and the following description is based entirely on a summary by G. Schurhammer found in the Jesuit Shembaganur Archives, vol. 13, #261.

[43] E.g., Gonsalvez describes the myths of the demon king Hiraṇya, and of Rāma, whom Vaiṣṇava Hindus believe to be God descended to earth. de Nobili discusses both Hiraṇya and Rāma in the *Dialogue*, respectively at 7.2 and 8.2.

flourishes, despite persecutions.[44] He concludes with a summation of how all these reasons prove that the Christian religion alone is true. The mix of reasoning and religious argument we find in the *Historia* is quite similar to that found in de Nobili's writing, though the *Historia* is perhaps less well integrated.

A third important figure is Jacobo Fenicio, S.J. (1558-1632), an older contemporary of de Nobili who worked in western India, in the Cochin area, and also along the Malabar coast. He became proficient in Malayalam, another vernacular, used astronomy as a tool for winning the attention of learned Hindus, and engaged in debates with Brahmins. Today Fenicio is remembered, if at all, for his major work in Portuguese, the *Livro da Seita Dos Indios Orientais*, written about 1609.[45] The *Livro* is a detailed exposition of Hindu beliefs and practices, into which are integrated a theological assessment and refutation of those same beliefs and practices. In it Fenicio describes in great detail Hindu beliefs and traditions with respect to cosmologies, customs, and major deities, including popular figures such as Rāma and Kṛiṣṇa. At key points he interjects theological arguments against the Hindu beliefs he has been describing. The *Livro*'s immediate aim seems to have been to furnish its readers with an adequate knowledge of Hindu mythology, as a necessary prerequisite for apologetics. A guide-book for missionaries, it exemplifies, in the words of John Correia-Afonso, "that scholarly spirit which is not always to be found, even

[44] de Nobili makes a similar defense of the Christian faith — based on its difficulty, being-persecuted, etc. — in his *Refutation of Criticisms* (*Tūṣaṇatikkāram*).

[45] Fenicio's work was copied and reused by missionaries early on. Manoel Barradas, S.J. (1572-1646) made it possible for a part of the manuscript to circulate in Europe. Here is a brief outline of key themes: Book 1: Creation; the three major deities, Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva; the four ages of the world; Book 2: Śiva as Lord; comments divine corporality, sexuality, and sin; Book 3: Viṣṇu, and his descents (*avatāras*), fish, tortoise, boar, etc.; Books 4-5: an outline of the *Rāmāyana;* Book 6: the story of Krishna; the story of Kalki, the last *avatāra;* a criticism of transmigration; Book 7: other deities: Brahma, Ayappan; vs. the idea that there are three main gods (*trimūrti*); Book 8: vs. the cult of false gods in India.

in later centuries."[46] Correia-Afonso also observes that Fenicio's work was widely used though "(generally without acknowledgment) by other writers on India..."[47] Although de Nobili certainly did his own research, it is possible that he also drew on Fenicio's book when writing his own.

Fenicio's work combines the details of the study of Indian culture with theological argument much more than Gonsalvez's work did, and in this way his writing is more similar to de Nobili's works.[48] The following excerpt on the beliefs of the Hindu "sect" gives us a sense of Fenicio's style and intent, so very much like de Nobili's:

> From what we have already said, it is clearly proven that this superstitious and false Indian sect is an invention of men who are not well versed on either natural or divine topics. In this, and in raising their bellows, they are helped by the devil; as is written, "His breath makes the hot coals burn." As we have proven and as the Brahmins themselves confess, what this sect affirms about the world and its parts is contrary to cosmography and astronomy. What this sect says of its gods

[46] Correia-Afonso, p. 104.

[47] Correia-Afonso, p. 104.

[48] See Saulière, Chapter 3. Jarl Charpentier edited and published the *Livro* in an abridged version, drawing on the manuscript which is the British Museum manuscript. Unfortunately, since he was interested only in what Fenicio has to tell us about Indian culture and Hinduism, and not the missionary's theological views, he actually omitted the theological portions of Fenicio's work, and gave only the summary statements regarding the omitted sections, e.g.: "General polemics against the idea of a corporeal god; God's omnipresence," (Book 2, c. 2); "General polemics with quotations from Lactantius, St. Augustine and Plutarch," (Book 2, c. 3); "Polemics against the idea of God committing sin," (Book 2, c. 9); "the author states that *Ixora* [i.e., the Lord] although possessing two wives, has no son similar to himself," (Book 2, c. 23); "There follows... a lengthy refutation of the doctrine of transmigration," (Book 6, c. 18); "This chapter consists of purely theological and polemical matters," (Book 7, c. 4); "The author attacks the worship of idols and defends that of the sacred images of his Church," (Book 8, c. 3).

> is repugnant to the natural reason we all share. Natural reason (which the Malabars [Hindus] call Logic) is a fire, a ruler, that God gave us... These Gentiles should examine whether what their superstition affirms about their gods is in accord with the [reasoned] rule of their minds or not. If it is, it is good and from God, because the rule is from God; but if it is not in accord with this rule, it is bad and not from God. The right reasoning of our understanding says that God is only one and that he is immense and infinite spirit without a source [other than himself]. He is the first cause of everything that exists, without having a superior or anyone equal to himself. He is immortal, omniscient, almighty, the supreme goodness and supreme truth, of himself blessed and incapable of sin... [But this sect [the Hindus] says instead that] there are three gods, Iśvara [Śiva], Viṣṇu, and Brahma, and that they are corporeal, finite, and limited to particular places. It admits that these gods had a beginning and that they will have an end. It confesses that they are ignorant, sinners, liars, drunkards, lustful and misfortunate. All this is contrary to what our understanding dictates about God's being, and it is therefore clear that they cannot be gods. Consequently, they do not deserve our adoration or sacrifices. Moreover, a sect that affirms such a thing is itself false and not from God.[49]

Important similarities therefore emerge when we consider de Nobili not in isolation but along with Fernandes, Gonsalvez, and Fenicio. They are significant enough to dispel the notion that de Nobili was the only Jesuit studying Indian culture and Hindu religious beliefs and practices, or the only early Jesuit missionary in India to integrate a Christian theological perspective with knowledge of Hindu beliefs and practices. Rather, he did very well what others were also doing.

[49] From the manuscript of the *Livro*, pp. 268-270, as translated from the Portuguese by Virgilio Oliveira e Costa, S.J., We are grateful to Fr. Oliveira for making this comparison possible.

But de Nobili was distinctive in his mastery of the Tamil vernacular and in his use of it as a medium of expression. Using the latest, most detailed and authoritative information he could gather, de Nobili took a range of arguments and theological judgments, known already in Latin and Portuguese, and expressed them in Tamil for local readers. Works such as the *Dialogue* and *Inquiry* were intended to be read, pondered, and debated not just by Christians thinking about Hindus, but by learned Hindus as well. This is probably not the case with the *Tratado, Historia,* and *Livro*, which were meant for the missionaries themselves.

If de Nobili's intense desire to communicate with Hindus distinguishes the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry*, it was his famous willingness to forsake European customs, dress, food, etc., and follow Indian customs in every way possible that inspired the theory of culture and religion defended in the *Report.* He wanted to become like the people around him so that he could communicate to them truths which they needed and would surely accept, were they communicated in the proper way.

IV. Toward an Assessment of de Nobili

Deferring more definitive conclusions for another time, we conclude with an initial assessment of de Nobili's project as exemplified in the three texts translated in this volume. As the editors of this volume, we shall do this from two Jesuit perspectives, one Indian and one American.

1. An Evaluation from an Indian Jesuit's Perspective (by Anand Amaladass, S.J.)

Roberto de Nobili occupies an important place as a pioneer in the history of the Indian Christian mission. His importance is evident just from the fact that even today he is praised by some and attacked by others. Unfortunately, both the extremely positive and extremely negative reactions to de Nobili are based on prejudiced or ill-informed reports about his lifestyle and his option to work among the high caste people of India. The divisions among Catholics and Protestants and their rivalry have also contributed to a negative

picture of him.[50] Neither extreme helps us to assess de Nobili and his contribution to the Church in India and to the world of scholarship as a theologian and scholar of religion in India. Rather, we must study de Nobili's own works in Tamil and Latin. This enables us to assess him a little more objectively and to give the credit due the scholar, while looking critically at the approach he adopted towards other religions and assessing how far he understood his opponents and how adequately he evaluated them from his faith-based intellectual perspective as a scholar and missionary. I organize my comments according to five points: first, de Nobili's ability to handle Indian languages; second, de Nobili as a scholar who was also a missionary; third, de Nobili's polemic against idol worship; fourth, de Nobili's polemic against *avataras*; fifth, the extent of his lasting influence.

First, we know that de Nobili wrote in several languages: Latin, Portuguese, Italian, Tamil, and also, it is said, in Sanskrit and another Indian vernacular, Telegu.[51] de Nobili's Tamil works are available to us, and we can recognize his skill in using Tamil to express philosophical and theological ideas with ease. Even today some Hindu commentators use a heavily Sanskritized style when writing Tamil, and one cannot understand them without knowledge of Sanskrit. But this is not the case with de Nobili, who writes Tamil clearly and forcefully. He frequently uses Sanskrit words, but his sentence structure is typically Tamil and educated Tamil speakers could easily follow his style. He nuances the interpretation of Latin scholastic philosophical terms with Tamil etymologies for equivalent terms, yet without encumbering the texts with excessive technical

[50] Many things were attributed to him which are proved to be untrue, namely that he wrote a work called *Jesusvedam* (*Yajurveda*) to mislead people, etc. In fact de Nobili has been suspected of incompetence, forgery and fraud, and been attacked both by the Christians and Brahmins. See Rocher on the idea that the Jesuit missionaries composed a "false" Veda, and on the suspicion, now largely abandoned, that its author was de Nobili.

[51] Although none of his Sanskrit works is preserved, his fairly subtle analysis of Sanskrit words and sentences in the *Report* indicates that he is likely to have known Sanskrit fairly well. Nothing of his Telegu writings is extant.

detail. Once one becomes familiar with his style, one notices his power of expression.

Second, de Nobili was a good scholar who was in his own way very sympathetic towards the social habits of Indians. But because of his deep classical and scholastic understanding of the dogmas he applies the principles of non-contradiction and identity very forcibly: true or false, good or evil, one or the other, not both at once. The *Dialogue* is an apologetic work meant to explain Christian understanding of eternal life, so he has to exclude all other possibilities. His arguments are solid and consistent with his faith and with his philosophical and theological premises. Nevertheless, he was a man of his time and place, holding a colonialist attitude at least regarding faith and religion.

He adopted local customs in order to win over the people of his day and to communicate his message, and not necessarily because he appreciated these customs. One cannot expect that kind of appreciation from a man like de Nobili. But this point is not to be taken negatively. After all, he was a missionary and his missionary goal, which gave meaning to his life and work, was before him all the time. His commitment came first and his personal taste was secondary; he was ready to sacrifice his preferences in order to facilitate his missionary work.

de Nobili made a choice in that work, to labor among the elite in India and to adapt himself to the task in terms of dress and life style of high caste people. In the Indian context, this also kept him away from the other sections of the Indian community, namely the lower strata of society. On this basis one can say that he accepted the existing structure of society and did not attempt to question the place and influence of caste in Tamil Nadu. He adapted himself to the situation and went about achieving his goal, preaching and converting people of high caste.

His intellectual apostolate among the educated high caste and his rational approach in dealing with the religions of India surely had consequences. Trained in a specific school of theology, firmly

attached to his scholastic background, and perhaps endowed as well with a colonial attitude, in the end he could not make a real breakthrough. His works in Tamil do not reflect a sympathetic attitude. Rather, a sense of superiority is evident, as he sought to prove his religion right and other religions wrong. These motives and limits affected his scholarship at every point.

Third, the major thrust of argument in the *Dialogue* was directed to the assessment of idols, their origin in India, and the way they came to be divinized. de Nobili had in mind the Biblical *Book of Wisdom*, particularly chapters 13-15, which dealt with the question of idolatry. The reasons against idolatry in *Wisdom* are almost the same as those of de Nobili. Yet *Wisdom* 13.6 says, "May be we are too harsh with these people. After all they may have really wanted to find God, but they could not..." Oddly, although the letter cited near the beginning of our introduction indicates a longer term, gentler approach, one does not find this sympathetic tone dominant in de Nobili's actual vernacular writings. Perhaps he could not offer such sympathy, since he felt he had to fight against false gods and the religious, social ideas, and practices connected with them.

In the process of refuting false gods, de Nobili is of course totally rejecting any form of veneration directed toward human beings. Does this mean that he was unaware of the popular usage of terms for God? He seems not to have paid sufficient attention to the different forms of worship in day-to-day life, nor to distinguish among the kinds of veneration and respect paid to the different manifestations, divine descents (*avatāras*), saints and seers (many of whom were considered divine in some respect). Although he is not unaware of the different terms in use and the nuances of their meanings in a given context, his assessment of the idol worship is not sufficiently nuanced. People use the word *kaṭavul* for the Almighty, but the term *teyvam* ("divine") can be used for anyone who is manifesting a divine presence in his/her life and works. Even today people call someone who is noble, generous, dedicated,

merciful, etc., "God seen with the eyes" (as *kaṇkaṇṭa teyvam*), i.e., a manifestation of the divine in visible form.[52]

In the ancient Tamil wisdom text *Tirukkural* we find it said, "The lady of the house who worships her husband above the deity can signal the rain on command."(*Tirukkural* 55) As de Nobili himself admits in the later chapters of the *Report*, in India everything is in some way connected with the divine, and as such is eligible to receive some homage and worship. Such reverence need not be taken as idol worship. People may fall prostrate before elders to pay respect to them, just as they would do in a temple, but it is clear that they are not worshipping those persons as God. Rather, this reverence signals respect. Though de Nobili was quite perceptive and could see some of the theoretical issues, he did not seem really to understand the differences among the various forms of veneration manifest before parents, seers, saints, and the deceased, nor could he distinguish these from the worship of the transcendent and immanent Being, God. Rather, he saw undue worship for living and deceased humans as the basis for idolatry.

Fourth, it is strange that a scholar like de Nobili, who so strongly defended the incarnation of Christ, his birth in poverty, and his ill treatment, could not see similar phenomena in Hinduism. He is very harsh in judging and criticizing the divine descents (*avatāras*) of Rāma as portrayed in Hindu scriptures. Among the Hindu traditions, Vaiṣṇava theology comes rather close to the Christian understanding of incarnation; taken together these traditions should be a challenge to dialogue for scholars open to admitting similarities. de Nobili was already heir to a polemicized situation in which differences mattered more than similarities, and he had little interest in pointing out the common ground between Christian and Hindu

[52] In the *Dialogue* de Nobili uses the term *parāparavastu*, "transcendent and immanent Being," for the Ultimate Reality in a philosophical sense 45 times; *sarveśvara* for the "lord of all," "the Lord God," 234 times; *kaṭavul*, " God," as equivalent to *sarveśvara* 106 times; *karta*, "maker," for God the creator 24 times. For other forms of divine manifestation he uses the terms "god" and "deity," (*tevar, teyvam*) 40 times.

understandings of divine embodiment. So too, it seems he may not have been conversing with scholars acquainted with the theological interpretations and uses of popular myths.

Perhaps he was writing these texts for his followers or disciples to explain scholastic epistemology and natural theology, while using Sanskrit and Tamil vocabulary as a vehicle of expression — rather than intending to learn from the Hindu materials accessible to him. We do not know whether there was any refutation of his works by the learned Hindu scholars of his time, or even serious critique from his own disciples. The main thrust of his argument against the various incarnations was that they are immoral, connected with women, sex, etc. That is understandable from the point of view of an outsider to the tradition. But it is also a misunderstanding of the mythic mode of narrative, whose meaning and significance cannot be merely dismissed.

Objections to mythological narratives were voiced within the Hindu tradition itself, but efforts were made to clarify these points by theologians or scholars of the tradition.[53] de Nobili was probably not aware of such writings. Even if he had known them he would probably have dismissed them, since the Western attitude to gender issues — anything concerned with sex — tended to be negative, and the missionary attitude was to find fault with the other religions in order to establish the superiority of the Christian religion and morals.

The way de Nobili illustrates the situation here in India through the words of the disciple, his partner in the *Dialogue*, shows vast knowledge of learned traditions (*śāstras*), the mythology and epics, in Tamil and Sanskrit. It is notable that he does not quote any sources in the *Dialogue*. He lets his disciple speak of many practices and customs in this country, which he himself does not accept. It is probable that he received this information orally from his followers.

[53] The ritual theorist Kumarila Bhaṭṭa, for example, in his elaborate *Tantravārtika* commentary on Śabara's commentary on the *Mimāmsā Sutras* of Jaimini (*Tantravārtika* 1. 3. 4.) addresses some of these objections.

Yet the opposing Hindu views were rather subtle. The Vaiṣṇava theology of incarnation, for instance, was well-developed. Even today, Vaiṣṇava theologians make a distinction between full incarnation and partial incarnations. Only the full incarnations, i.e. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, are to be worshipped. Other forms, such as the fish, boar, etc., are not to be worshipped. God appears in a particular form at a particular time to fulfill a particular function. For example, the Vaiṣṇava theologian Piḷḷai Lokācārya, in his Tamil work the *Arthapañcaka* (13th century), comments on the nature of consecrated temple images as follows: "When God is present in the lifeless idol, he then becomes in every relationship subject to his worshipers. Although he is all-knowing, he appears to be ignorant; although conscious and living, he appears as lifeless; although independent, he appears to be completely dependent on others; though almighty, he appears as powerless; though perfect, as wanting in many things; though the Lord of the universe, helpless, hiding his Lordship; though invisible, making himself visible as an object to be grasped by our senses; although incomprehensible, making it easy for us to reach him; he makes himself present and near in holy places, in shrines and temples, in our cities and villages, in our homes and in the person of holy people..."[54] Despite his learning, it is striking that de Nobili's distinction between "the wise" and the idolaters did not allow him really to understand that there could be "learned idolaters."

Fifth, and finally, one can ask what is left of de Nobili's work in India, after all he did, wrote, and struggled for. Can his writings still serve as a source for academic reflection in the missionary history of the Church? There was no follow-up, although this was not de Nobili's fault, since other factors impeded the continuation of his approach. Problems soon arose, e.g., lack of support for his approach on the part of his colleagues in the Society and in the Church, lack of continuity in the projects he began, controversies regarding his work and persistent doubts about whether he did

[54] The *Arthapañcaka* of Piḷḷailokācārya, as included in the *Aṣṭadaśarahasyam*, edited by Krishnaswamy Ayyangar (Trichy, India: 1987), p. 44.

justice to the differences promoted by the Gospel. In any case, no tradition embodying de Nobili's methods flourished in the later history of the Catholic missions in India.

How then do we look at de Nobili today and evaluate him, his life-style and approach to mission, and his intellectual approach among the elite of his time? It is difficult to assess him as a "missionary," even if one resists the temptation to evaluate him from a contemporary point of view according to today's criteria of social awareness and its justice dimension. One must give the credit to de Nobili as a scholar, as a pioneer, as a path finder. He dared to make difficult choices at a difficult time. He sacrificed his taste and comfort for the sake of his intellectual and evangelical mission. He learned languages and explained himself well, engaging in dialogue with the elite of his time with competence and conviction. That meant making himself familiar with the intellectual tradition of his time. Despite all that has been negatively said about him, he is still a model for today. In the history of the Christian mission in India he cannot be merely ignored. Historically, he was one of the founders of the Jesuit commitment to an intellectual understanding of other religious traditions. Through his intellectual approach he made people think, offered criteria for evaluating a religion, exposed himself through dialogue, and articulated his positions clearly and without ambiguity. He had great confidence in his ability to justify correct Christian beliefs in dialogue with others who, though not believers, were at least willing to reason with him about religious matters. He did all these things well.

An intellectual approach has its logical consequences, and one's successes or failures both follow from the basic approach. de Nobili's great confidence in the power of Thomistic scholasticism enabled him to communicate reasonably with the Hindu intellectuals he encountered, but that same confidence in scholasticism also marked sharp boundaries which limited how far he might go in his appreciation of differing ideas expressed in differing intellectual frameworks. Many thinkers before and after de Nobili had to face the same situation concerning dialogue and mission towards the

followers of other religions. For example, in the Indian tradition, Vedāntic thinkers like Śaṅkara, or Rāmānuja or Madhva were sharply critical toward the Buddhists; e.g., the Vaiṣṇava thinker Vedānta Deśika criticized the Advaitins and the Śaivites, and the Śaiva text *Civajñānacittiyar* criticized Vaiṣṇava beliefs. Their critiques are not very different from how de Nobili criticized religious traditions other than his own.

His example is important for us today to keep in mind when we busy ourselves with interfaith dialogue. The theology of religions of earlier days was exclusive (i.e., the Christian faith alone is true, and nothing is to be learned from other faiths), or inclusive (i.e., what is true in other traditions is anticipated and completed in the fullness of the Christian faith). Despite the rise of a more pluralistic consciousness, even today many theologians still work with exclusivist or inclusivist presuppositions. We all want to understand one another and respect and learn from one another. We do admit the mutual influence that is possible in that process of dialogue. But there comes a stage when one has to take his/her stand to articulate what he/she believes and what sustains him/her. It is not possible to say that everything is acceptable with respect to what one stands for. So one ends up in the predicament of remaining silent or facing the consequences of opposing others. This is not merely a question of taking a clear stand with respect to what one believes and thinks, while allowing others to think and believe what they want. Rather, there is an inner urge to share with others what one has found to be true and valuable to a meaningful life. If what I believe and think makes sense logically to me and provides a meaning, it should have significance to others too. One is convinced that others who do not see this perspective could be brought to see what he himself has seen before. This becomes a 'mission' in fact, even if one does not impose or force it on others. Hence, there is a missionary dimension to everything that is experienced as genuinely and universally human.

Truth and goodness cannot be merely private. It would be naive to say that what I believe is good for me though not for others, or

that what others believe is good for them though not for me. Hence, what is true in de Nobili positions or regarding them must also be true for other thinkers, philosophers, or theologians. Even today, many Western philosophers still act as if there is no philosophy outside Europe; this Eurocentric thinking has long been characteristic of even greater thinkers in dominant European cultures. Even this kind of intellectual chauvinism is not without parallels in different cultures, and there are parallels in India. The dominant schools of Vedanta thought, for instance, explained other religions in light of their own teachings, as leading up to Vedanta.

What is important is not whether these thinkers forcefully put across their philosophy and theology as unique and so valid for all. They all attempted this, and rightly so. What is significant when evaluating these thinkers is to see whether they were also willing to learn from others and open themselves to influences from the outside, to acknowledge the validity of others' contribution to humanity. This sort of interculturality one does not expect from many even today, especially in the realm of religious belief, and we must admire de Nobili for what he accomplished so long ago.

2. An evaluation from an American Jesuit's perspective (by Francis X. Clooney, S.J.)

That Roberto de Nobili is an important figure well worth our attention today is the inspiration behind this volume. He was an early and creative Jesuit missionary, a pioneer in the study of Indian culture by Europeans, a cogent theorist on the topics of culture and religion and, by his way of life and decades of committed work in south India, an admirable, dedicated Christian. For reasons that may have more to do with the differing ways in which India and China have impacted the consciousness of the West, Mateo Ricci and his companions in China are far better known. Without detracting from their importance, we hope that this volume will draw more attention to de Nobili and, by extension, to contemporaries such as Gonsalvez and Fenicio. I suggest three ways in which de Nobili deserves consideration today: first, as an astute observer of Indian culture and religion; second, as a theorist holding an important though

controversial theory about the distinction between religion and culture; third, as a vigorous proponent of the role of reason in conversations across cultural and religious boundaries.[55]

First, de Nobili's writings, particularly the *Report*, form an invaluable source of information about religion in 17th century south India. He is one of the earliest foreigners to have observed so much, so well. Although, as we have proposed above, he is not unique, he does excel in combining *a priori* theorizing with textual erudition and empirical observation. As a missionary he had specific reasons for gathering information; he was assessing the culture in expectation of work to be done. Although his accounts cannot be treated as neutral information, nevertheless he was a realist in his expectations about truth, and believed that seeing things as they really are is the best preparation for the Gospel. As a result, we can be confident that he was sufficiently objective, and sufficiently explicit in his biases, that his writings afford us real insights into Indian culture and religion.

In the *Report* de Nobili describes in great detail the social structures of Indian society, Indian intellectual traditions, and the major schools of Hindu thought. From the *Inquiry* and the latter part of the *Dialogue*, we learn interesting and specific details about popular beliefs and practices current in his time. While a fuller sense of "de Nobili's India" would require study of his other works and his letters, and a comparison of his descriptions with those found in the works of other writers and in indigenous treatises, the *Report*, *Dialogue*, and *Inquiry* nevertheless already tell us a great deal about India in his time.

Indologists and scholars of religion will inevitably criticize de Nobili's reading of the various Hindu texts and customs he studied. Some may quarrel, most importantly, with his interpretation of the *Laws of Manu*, faulting him for too neatly dividing culture and religion, for secularizing brahmins and portraying them (simply) as

[55] See also Clooney 1998.

public intellectuals, for neatly reducing Hindu ritual and myth to the confines of "idolatry" and then judging an entire religious tradition on the basis of some practices and some beliefs. Such views and judgments are not easily supported on the basis of *Manu*. But even if such criticisms are accepted, they should not be allowed to obscure the value of the information he gives his readers, and of his pioneering attempt to make sense of a new culture and religion.

Second, de Nobili was a forceful theorist who used old ideas in new and interesting ways. Terms familiar to us were not available to him. E.g., the idea of "religion" was only developing in his time, and could not be an important category in his writing. Instead, he re-used the older terminology of "superstition" and "idolatry," balancing these with appeals to the "natural" and the "social." Although these categories could have been excessively confining in a culture defined by other terms, de Nobili used his European and Christian vocabulary in a generally constructive and positive fashion. By arguing that religious beliefs and practices must be understood in relation to more basic and (usually) sound natural and social concerns, he managed to draw a powerful analogy between Indian culture and religion and Greek and Roman culture and religion as these were understood in his time. In his view, India too was richly endowed with admirable social customs, a fine legal system, impressive philosophical theories. But, de Nobili suggests, erroneous religious beliefs and practices, particularly about God, were superimposed onto the basically sound foundations, and the overall combination fails to do justice to the best in Indian society itself. Therefore, de Nobili reasoned, one must carefully sort out the culture, disposing of the chaff of superstition and retaining what is good. This principle is articulated in the *Report*, and is operative in the criticisms of Indian religion found in the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry*.[56] This characterization of Indian culture would be

[56] The decision to interpret the newly-encountered religions in light of Aquinas' treatise on idolatry was, as we have seen, a strategy for combining Christian faith with a commitment to the power of reasoning in a comparative context, and was meant to preserve and respect as much as possible of Hindu culture by exposing the overlay of mistaken theory and practice. The evidence adduced by de Nobili served mainly to reaffirm the position abstractly elucidated by Aquinas, whose main guide was the Biblical *Book of Wisdom*.

sufficiently familiar to Europeans that they could begin to respond to India by drawing on what they knew already about Greece and Rome. de Nobili helped make it possible for missionary work to stand on a sophisticated basis in cultural theory, so that even aggressive apologetics would have to be rooted in an overall positive cultural assessment.

But it is no minor adjustment to divide up someone else's culture in this manner, relegating its specific religious beliefs and practices to a secondary, derivative position and then recommending that they be discarded. Indians saw their social, cultural, and religious ideas and practices as deeply related even if in some respects distinct; de Nobili saw them as more easily separable. His critique was potentially much more devastating and unfriendly than he may have personally imagined it to be, and it is no surprise that most Hindu intellectuals were reluctant to embrace de Nobili's positions. Even if de Nobili had more success than other missionaries, we have no evidence that his views made any lasting impact on Hindu intellectual life.

Nor should we be surprised that many missionaries remained skeptical that the distinction of religion and culture was important enough to lead to a workable separation of true culture from false religion. In their view, it seems, it was better to strip Indian life down to the bare essentials, and reformulate it entirely according to the ideas, values, and practices of Christian Europe. While this view arguably did even more damage to the traditions of India, at least it acknowledged the interconnection between religion and culture, according to a sensitivity which, oddly enough, seems to have been shared by conservative Hindus and conservative Christians. Most brahmins, I suspect, would have agreed with de Nobili's conservative Christian critics on the deep interconnection between religion and social order, and would therefore have agreed that conversion would be more disruptive than de Nobili thought it had to be.

However one assesses the missionary effectiveness of de Nobili's theories and methods, his writings are worth careful study. He stands at the beginning of a continuing tradition of Western scholarship which has ventured to interpret India and its religious heritage according to European intellectual conceptions. For this reason alone, his work offers Western scholars a revealing mirror. A key next step for scholars will be to review de Nobili's project in light of the full range of critical perspectives available to him and also in light of those available to us. We will then be able to review more critically his work, but also modern academic interpretations of the interconnection between religions and cultures.

Third, as is implied in the preceding points, de Nobili was confident that reason is a fundamentally human and universal principle which operates in basically the same way in all cultural and religious settings. Reasoning could therefore be a key "tool" in religious conversations, as one attempted to persuade others to think more reasonably, step away from errors and confusions, and become more receptive to higher truths. de Nobili had great confidence in his own ability to reason about religion, and he believed that the Indians he met shared this ability. Even if he was a stranger in a strange land, he was confident that he could understand, communicate, and persuade. After just a few years, he felt up to the task of making definitive judgments about what was true and false, sound and shameful, in Indian culture and religion, judging everything from a higher viewpoint based not only on revelation but also on reason.

de Nobili was genuinely respectful of his audience, since he was confident that reasoning is effective in every cultural and religious setting, that every conversation partner is potentially capable of clear reasoning, and that every person, even those mired in error, is able to leave error behind and become receptive to higher, salvific truths. Yet on the same basis he could also be aggressive. Reasoning must respect the truth, and reasonable people cannot leave room for errors, however traditional they may be. The missionary must

respect the natives enough to persevere in demonstrating the folly of their beliefs.

His respect for reasoning's power also had its practical disadvantages. It seems to have made him tone-deaf, unable to see that reason, culture, and religion might cohere in ways genuinely and more deeply unfamiliar to him. His confidence that he could understand also made him more likely to misunderstand. While he was familiar with the necessary adjustments that had been made to establish the harmony of Christian faith and human reasoning, he seemed unaware that such adjustments might have occurred in the Indian intellectual traditions as well. It seems quite possible, for instance, for a learned Hindu to reason quite proficiently about God while yet making allowance for quite jarring mythological narratives about how gods act. For de Nobili there was ultimately just one proper mode of religious thinking, one authentic human culture (though it might vary in details), and even one reasonable form of divine activity. Since he already understood these from his Christian tradition, alternatives were also competitors and hence could not be taken seriously. As a result, his writings, while invaluable, do not give us an integral sense of Indian culture and religion.

His insightful use of religious reasoning shows us a way to imagine viable conversation across all the boundaries which divide human beings. But we must doubt whether such conversation could lead where de Nobili hoped it would. A clear exposition of reasonable principles does not necessarily lead to a decision to choose a "most reasonable" religious tradition, nor to abandon one's traditional beliefs if they seem not to measure up to an agreed upon standard of reasoning. In the *Inquiry* de Nobili responds to justifications people might have for offered in defense of their traditional religious views,[57] but his response was swift, heated, and so focused on the desired result — conversion — that he very quickly dismissed the possibility that intellectuals might actually have been able to reconcile traditional beliefs with critical thinking.

[57] *Inquiry*, sections VII.3 to VII.6.

Successes notwithstanding, the result seems to have been a lack of mutual comprehension. When his Hindu listeners seemingly conceded defeat and then turned away in silence, it puzzled de Nobili why they never returned to learn more about the more reasonable religion, the Catholic faith. Recall the frustration expressed in a letter to his cousin, cited earlier in this introduction:[58] "...I treat with those Gentiles to show them the folly and perversity of their faith, which it is not difficult to prove... when I have argued with them they declare themselves convinced, but all do not answer the call. They go away more confused than converted."

If some of us hesitate at so confident and intense a sense of the alliance between Christian faith and human reason, some may find de Nobili too ready to preach wisdom to the wise, too hesitant to preach a Gospel which must also be "folly to the wise." Some may find that de Nobili's reasoned approach obscures what must be a necessary rupture between Christian faith and Indian culture. But all of these hesitations, I suspect, would only prompt de Nobili to argue all the more vigorously, with Christians and Hindus alike, that reason is a helpful guide in approaching that point where it must step aside and let faith and grace complete God's work.

What is most impressive, perhaps, about de Nobili's bold synthesis is that these intellectual and practical questions endure as living issues four hundred years after his arrival in India. The project of interpreting the enormous diversity of "Hinduism" — "Hinduisms" some say — continues today; the question about where Indian culture ends and Hindu religion begins has not been satisfactorily resolved in any broadly accepted way; the role of reasoning in the assessment of religious traditions is still contested. It is greatly to de Nobili's credit that even now we find it necessary and useful to argue with him about his great project, his ministry to the wise.

[58] See note 24.

A Note on the Texts and Translations

The origins of this volume lay in our shared conviction that it was important to bring before a wider audience Roberto de Nobili's Tamil-language writings, which have thus far not appeared in English, and so the core of this volume lies in our new translations of the *Dialogue on Eternal Life and The Inquiry into the Meaning of "God."* Yet, as we hope to have shown in the preceding pages, his Tamil writings are richly complemented by his Latin treatises, since the latter give the rationale for his earnest ventures in dialogue. For this reason we have included the *Report on the customs of the Indian nation.* Despite their different audiences, both the Latin and Tamil works demonstrate his confidence in reason, his willingness to make accommodations in cultural but not religious matters, and his nuanced but firm understanding of the excellence of Christianity.

The *Report* was published almost 30 years ago in a Latin-English edition entitled *Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs*. The manuscript was transcribed by Fr. J. Pujo, S.J., translated by Archbishop Peter Leonard, and published by Fr. S. Rajamanickam, S.J. in 1972. Since that translation is not easily available outside of India, the audience for it has been undeservedly small. Fr. Rajamanickam has kindly given us permission to use and adapt that translation for this volume. We have reproduced it essentially as is without attempting a fresh translation from the Latin, but where necessary have clarified de Nobili's thought and made the treatise easier reading for those who do not already have considerable familiarity with Indian thought. This means that there have been a number of small adjustments and corrections in the translation, plus the addition of more explanatory notes. In keeping with the earlier edition of the *Report* as *Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs,* we have not corrected the Sanskrit texts cited by de Nobili, nor made any attempt to improve his translations of them. The *Report* quotes widely from Christian sources in support of his positions, but we have identified these writers and sources only very minimally, assuming greater familiarity in this regard among our readers.

As for the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry,* we have sought to make the translations as accessible as possible, sparing the reader unnecessary footnotes and too much Indological commentary or elaboration of Christian scholastic parallels. We have explained the references to Hindu beliefs and practices when we thought this necessary to make sense of de Nobili's points, yet without entering into elaborate explanations. The numbering of sections of the translations of the *Dialogue* and *Inquiry* is our work; we have added section subtitles to make the flow of the arguments clearer. We have kept the subtitles that had been added to the *Report.*

Preaching Wisdom to the Wise is very much a collaborative effort. Although we both already were familiar with the Tamil sources before beginning the project, Anand Amaladass took the lead in drafting the first translations of the *Dialogue* and the *Inquiry*; thereafter, Francis Clooney checked these against the originals, and then we sat together and revised them line by line, while adding useful annotations. The final revisions on all three texts were done by Clooney. This introduction, the product of our long discussions of de Nobili, is by Clooney, excepting the section entitled "An Evaluation from an Indian Jesuit's Perspective." But in the end, *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* is very much our shared labor.

We have dedicated this volume to Fr. S. Rajamanickam, S.J. long-time director of de Nobili Research Center in Tamil Nadu, India. More than anyone else he has uncovered and preserved the writings of Robert de Nobili, and made it possible for new generations of scholars to study him today.

PART TWO

THE TRANSLATIONS

1
Report on Indian Customs

2
Dialogue on Eternal Life

3
Inquiry into the Meaning of "God"

Part II: Translations

1

To our Father General
Report Concerning Certain Customs of the Indian Nation

Reasons for writing this treatise[1]

It is of the very nature of truth that the more closely it is examined with all fidelity and sympathy, the more splendidly does it shine forth, and the more firmly grounded it proves itself to be in the eyes of judicious investigators. Working on this principle and with no other end in view than the glory of God and the salvation of souls, during the last three years[2] I have been examining anew and with perseverance revolving in my mind the truth of those statements which bear on the customs of this country. As a result, far from any doubt thrusting itself upon me concerning the matters I recently wrote about,[3] in fact fresh and far stronger and clearer evidence presented itself in confirmation of the views I then expressed. Indeed, although previously a certain uneasiness haunted my mind as to whether some superstitious element, be it only accidentally and by second intention, might be latent in the wearing of the so-called thread which is the distinctive caste mark of the brahmins, now, thanks to further clarification, all such uncertainty is decisively ended.

To be frank, it is quite true that in preceding years, while my stand on the other (controverted) matters was absolute and unconditional, in the matter of the brahminical thread I made a distinction by referring to a twofold intention, one primary, the other secondary. I did so not because I saw any real ground for a distinction in the matter concerned, but out of consideration for my opponents, honorable men whose opinion, different from mine, I

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1 The section titles are not in the Latin, but were added in the 1972 English edition.

2 1610-1613.

3 In his *Apology*, dated October 10, 1610.

considered worthy of respect, even though I knew them to be deceived by ignorant and ill-informed advisers. Plain, then, as it was to me from a study of the classics of this country that the wearing of the said thread was nothing more than a civil usage, still I was somewhat overawed by the judgment of those honorable gentlemen; I wondered whether one might not rightly conclude from certain actions of not a few brahmins that the thread was tainted by superstition, albeit only in a casual and accessory manner. However, during the last three years, if I am not mistaken, I have added sufficiently to my knowledge based not only on books but also on the actual practice and on the common usage made of all these things by the peoples here. Now I feel compelled by conscience to make myself heard once more, lest by yielding to human respect I should in some way impede the cause of truth, and lest I should in due course have to give an account to God for the loss of innumerable souls, whose blood — so to speak — the most just Judge might well require at my hands, should I by reason of an unseemly modesty remain reticent in a matter of such importance about which I have gained perfectly sure and reliable information.

Hence, although in private letters I have set forth my findings to those entitled to know about them, I have decided to expound them here at greater length by furnishing clear and distinct particulars on all the facts of the case. In so doing, my object is to enable all men, but particularly the prelates of the Church of India whose primary and official concern it is to procure the salvation of souls in these realms, to pass judgment and to decide on each particular issue. Therefore I hope that I may kindly be allowed to write rather more copiously in this memorandum. For the importance of the subject matter demands that all its parts and all the circumstances that are solidly relevant be fully explained, and likewise that the most prevalent customs be duly expounded together with the chief textual references on which my opinion concerning these matters is based. It seems also good to set these down in their proper Grantha characters[4] as they are found in the books, so that all the statements

[4] "Grantha" here means a particular alphabet in which Sanskrit was written and, by extension, the Sanskrit language itself. Throughout we substitute "Sanskrit" for "Grantha" if it is clear that the Sanskrit language is meant.

can be checked and weighed, and their exact meaning controlled by anyone thoroughly familiar with the Grantha language.

By way of appendix to the whole subject herein discussed I have added a long list of testimonies by eminent teachers from among the brahmins actually living here. After thus presenting all the material which strikes me as reliable at all points, I trust that, for one thing, those of our Society selected to pass judgment on the matter will find in these pages all they need for their deliberations, and that, for another thing, I myself shall no longer be compelled by religious scruples to belabor the question in the future.

Chapter One

Social Structures of the Indian State According to the Civil Law

Indian Society is first divided into four grades of civil functions to which there corresponds a similar gradation in nobility, as all those who live in close intercourse with these people know full well and as is amply detailed in the eighteen volumes of Smṛti[5] where we find arranged in proper order the whole body of laws in regard of the ranking of the citizens, their government, and the enumeration of the clans. The best description, however, is found in the book dubbed the *Laws of Manu*, which commands the highest authority.[6]

1.1. Brahmins

The first grade or class of citizens is that of the "wise." These are called brahmins, supposedly from the word *bṛhmate*, which means "to know."[7] To this order pertains the teaching of the sciences, particularly of the higher sciences such as logic, philosophy, and theology. As will be seen in Chapter Three, these sciences are, so to say, the brahmin's special pursuit. He treats also of the laws of these sciences, of history, and, in fine, of astronomy, rhetoric, poetry, and fables written in the Sanskrit language (which here ranks as does Latin with us). This does not mean that all handle all subjects, since the vast number and range of the subjects make this impossible. But some boast more, some less, of these

5 *Smṛti* — literally, "what is remembered" — refers to traditional teachings, including codified collections of such traditions. Although these traditional teachings are ranked below the highest level of revelation, *śruti* ("what was heard"), they are important and influential. Throughout, we retain the word Smṛti.

6 The *Laws of Manu* are referred to repeatedly by de Nobili; *Manu* is a comprehensive descriptive legal work which embodies traditional Hindu law, and it includes the theology behind the law as well. The most recent translation is that by Wendy Doniger and Brian Smith.

7 The root *bṛh* more normally is taken to indicate "to grow great" or "to grow expansive."

disciplines. Some profess themselves to be learned teachers in the speculative sciences, i.e., in philosophy and theology, others are learned teachers of law, others of moral science (*dharmaśāstras*), while others claim competence in astrology (*jyotiśāstra*). Still others parade as *śabdaśāstris*, i.e., as learned teachers of the science of words, a science which for these people stands for one of the highest faculties (as will be explained in Chapter Three). Others are poets or expositors of songs. The position held by philosophy is set down in those *Laws of Manu* which I mentioned just above, in verse II.117 beginning with the word *laukikam*[8] and in many other verses which will be adduced later in the following chapters. What we are going to assert heavily depends on this very point, so it calls for more careful study.

1.2. Kṣatriyas

The second class of citizens is that of kings or chiefs, and of royal families. Their role is to pursue as equally primary occupations the government of the state and the conduct of war and arms. They are called rājās or kṣatriyas — a name derived, they maintain, from kṣatāt *trāyante*, meaning "they free (people) from fear." This function of their order is set down in many references, but specifically in the verse of the text we have already mentioned, the *Laws of Manu*: *saṁgrāmesvanivarttitvaṁ prajānāṁ caiva pālanam, śuśrūsā brāhmanānāṁ ca rājñāṁ śreyaskaraṁ paraṁ* (VII. 88).[9]. I.e., "Not to flee in battle, to protect the people, and to

8 Referred to also in section 2.1 where the verse is cited more fully and translated by de Nobili. We can note here that throughout the *Report* there are numerous small differences between de Nobili's citations of Sanskrit texts and the standard Sanskrit versions of these texts as available to us today. This is so particularly regarding *The Laws of Manu*, which de Nobili quotes most frequently. We have usually followed the text as given here, however, and have not attempted to emend either the Sanskrit citations or de Nobili's Latin translations of them.

9 There are numerous differences between de Nobili's citations of Sanskrit texts as transcribed in the manuscript of the *Report*, and standard Sanskrit versions of these texts now available to us. This is particularly so regarding *The Laws of Manu*, which de Nobili quotes most frequently. We have followed the translator, however, and not attempted to emend the citations which serve as the basis for de Nobili's Latin translations of them.

mind the words of the wise — in these three (duties) lie crystallized the rulers' activity, good, and excellence."

1.3. Vaiśyas

The third class is that of the freeborn merchants, those who devote themselves to the acquisition of wealth by dealing in apparel, gems, and other articles of the same quality; to trade in these is considered honorable, a contribution to the vigor and prosperity of the State. They are called Kōmaṭṭis[10] in Tamil and Vaiśyas in Sanskrit, from the word *viśati*, meaning "to enter upon" ("to advance"). They thereby understand the acquisition of goods or riches. The kinds of respectable merchandise in which the vaiśyas are authorized to trade with dignity are listed in the same book, in the following words: *maṇimuktā pravāḷānāṁ lohānāṁ tāntavasyaca gandhānāṁ ca rasānāṁ ca vidyādalpa balābalam; mānayogāṁśca janīyāt tulāyogāmśca sarvaśaḥ* (9.329-30). I.e., "To know, deal out, appraise precious stones, large gems, red coral ware, metals, dyed clothing, down to perfumes and dainties, as well as to know their prices and values — all this pertains to the function of this class." Further, we gather from the verse which begins with the word *paśūnām* (I. 90) that the vaiśyas may also engage in agriculture, provided they refrain from doing the actual tilling themselves. As to the object which is to be kept in mind in the exercise of all these skills, we find that it too is stated in the passage quoted above: "The vaiśyas should see to it that as a result of doing business in all these directions and of lending out money, the whole community is benefited, in conformity to justice, by the accumulation of wealth."

1.4. Śūdras

The fourth class consists of those employed in works which are considered servile here, reserved for serfs. They are called śūdras, supposedly from the word *śocati*, i.e., to be depressed or to work under irksome stress, because their condition deprives them of the dignity which the three higher classes enjoy, and condemns them to a lifelong and irksome serfdom. Hence the book referred to

[10] Merchants of a caste speaking the Telegu language of Andhra Pradesh, the state north of the Tamil-speaking area where de Nobili's worked.

above, after reviewing the three higher classes spoken of so far, proceeds to assign the life task to this lower class in this laconic formula: *ekam eva tu śūdrasya prabuḥ karma samādiśat, eteṣām eva varṇānām śuśruṣām anasūyayā*. (I.91). I.e., "To the śūdras or plebeians is enjoined this single task, namely, that they stand ungrudgingly at the service and convenience of the higher classes enumerated above."

1.5. Śūdras are Subdivided into 6 Classes:

However, as the same source informs us, this class admits of quite a considerable diversity in regard of dignity or rank within itself, and may thus broadly be subdivided into six other categories or sub-classes. The first category among the śūdras is comprised of the cultivators of land who are called Velāḷas. As these stand highest among the śūdras, they too come near to boasting a certain nobility of birth or stock. The second category is comprised of the servants and attendants attached to princely households, but employed only in occupations of a somewhat meaner kind: such are the Tōṭṭiyar, Arupeni, Maravar,[11] and others of the same ilk. The third category is comprised of artisans with some social standing, among whom are ranked carpenters, tailors, masons, etc. The fourth category is comprised of mechanics engaged in more sordid crafts, e.g., barbers, fullers, and others of the same type. The fifth category is made up of diggers and ditchers who answer to the name of Paḷḷars. As may be inferred from the designation of their employment, these serve as field laborers under the velāḷas. The sixth category consists of people considered rustics who, in keeping with the designation of the work they are attached to, may take service under anyone, however low or ignoble he may be. These people they call parayas.

1.6. Profession is Enforced by Law According to Caste

All sections of the population within this country may conveniently be reduced to these classes of people with their graded social ranks. To each particular grade or class there corresponds a particular office or function. For the sake of brevity,

[11] These were considered very low-caste communities.

however, I will abstain from quoting from the books. Moreover, Indian society differs from foreign societies particularly in this, that here men are sorted out precisely on the basis of the functions they fulfill, and that their respective social rank is attributed not to merit but to class superiority transmitted by generation.[12] It follows from this that in India we find as many distinct clans or tribes as there are distinct classes of occupations or civic functions, and that their respective nobility or lack of it is proportioned to the respective superiority of the functions they discharge. Indeed, that a man's excellence stems from his office or employment can be inferred from the *Laws of Manu* 2.155 (beginning with the word *viprāṇāṁ*),[13] as well as from many other references. If a member of a higher class should sink to performing the pursuits of a lower class, he is reputed to have fallen from his birth clan and grade of nobility, and to have become equal to those who belong to that lower class by birth. Thus it fares with a brahmin, the same book states beginning with the words *sadyaḥ patati* (*Laws of Manu* 10.92), and in many other passages, some of which I shall adduce in the next chapter. The same rule is set down but more generally so as to apply to all the diverse classes in the verse which runs as follows: *varaṁ svadharmo viguṇo na pārakyaḥ svanuṣṭhitaḥ paradharmeṇa jivanhi sadyaḥ patati jātitaḥ* (10.97). I.e., "Should anyone so succumb to intemperate greed as to scorn his own proper functions and spend his life in the occupations of an alien clan, let him be forthwith struck off from his own grade." If, on the other hand, a member of a lower class happens to be admitted to the functions of a superior class, the king is directed to have him beaten with cudgels and banished from the realm. The said rule runs as follows: *yo lobhāt adhamo jātyā jived utkṛṣṭa karmabhiḥ, tam rājā nidhanaṁ kṛtvā kṣipram eva pravāsayet* (10.96). I.e., "Should a member of an inferior order usurp the functions of a superior order, let the king have him beaten and expelled." Should, however, some lowborn persons, by reason of the king's neglect of duty or by force, manage to enter with impunity upon offices proper to the higher orders — as does happen — they are

[12] I.e., by birth.

[13] Cited in section 2.1.

nonetheless excluded from the dignity and honor of the higher grade as well as from any title of nobility in public estimation.

Finally, to come to the usages and civil ways of living of these people, what has been said regarding the offices peculiarly assigned to each civil order holds fairly well also for their respective habits in regard to dress, eating, and other aspects of bodily care. Corresponding to the higher or lower degree of office and social standing characterizing each individual class, there is similarly found a higher or lower level of refinement and cleanliness peculiar to each class. Hence, we find that the social usages of brahmins are held to be the choicest of all; next in rank come those of the rulers; then, those of the respectable merchant class, and in the last place those of the other orders. Under this head — i.e., holding fast to the usages determined for each grade — prescriptions imposed on this score are the most rigorous of all, as will be pointed out at the end of this treatise.

Chapter Two

In Support of the View that the Brahmins, by Reason of their Social Rank and Specific Office, Constitute the Particular Class of the Learned

2.0. Brahmins are Wise Men and Command the Highest Esteem

In the preceding chapter points were stated concerning the specific office of the brahmin order without proper references in support, (though in regard to the other orders the references were duly set down). In this chapter, we shall now proceed to explain and prove [points regarding brahmins] at greater length. To tell the truth, however, I honestly hold that for the purpose of eliminating any doubt concerning what was stated in the foregoing chapter, the authority of our own writers alone should be quite sufficient. Take for instance the testimony of Bardeseres the Babylonian,[14] a writer highly commended by Eusebius in the 6th Book on his *Propagation of the Gospel.*[15] This writer has it that not only do the brahmins represent India's intelligentsia, but that the teaching profession is, as it were, hereditary among them, descending from father to son in regular succession. Both these points were made in the previous chapter.

Sufficient proof is also found, it would seem, in the very name "brahmin," meaning man of learning from the word *bṛhmate*, i.e., "to know," as noted above. Finally, sufficient proof — again, so it would seem — lies in the fact that those brahmins who in this country command the highest esteem and are regarded as truly authentic brahmins are precisely those whose constant activity ad practice consists in nothing else than in the teaching of the sciences. As to the nature of these sciences, it will be shown in the next chapter that they are not to be condemned outright as superstitious and all morally bad.

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[14] Bardeseres (154 CE, Syria) wrote the *Dialogue of Destiny* (*The Book of the Laws of the Countries*).

[15] *Demonstratio evangelica*, *Preparatio evangelica*, and *Ecclesiastical History* are among the most important works of Eusebius (260-339).

2.1. Brahmins are Wise Men

Nevertheless, in order that the truth of my statement, thus supported by the consensus of successive centuries and thus unanimously proven down the ages, may be thereby further corroborated (since there is need for such corroboration) by India herself adding her written testimony to the authority of our own writers, I shall do this in the present chapter. To begin with I shall show that the order of brahmins, being what it is and given the specific function it fulfills, indeed constitutes the order of the "learned." Next, I shall briefly show also that as a social class it stands first in excellence among all the classes.

So, then, to prove that the order of brahmins as such constitutes the order of the "learned" and that precisely in this lies its distinction from other classes of citizens, I will adduce statements to that effect which we find here and there in the literature of this country, especially in the collections of Smṛti from which, as I have noted in the preceding chapter, an exhaustive account of the several orders and clans with their distinctive particularities is to be gathered.

Thus, in a comprehensive formula in verse 11.236 of the *Laws of Manu*, reference to the office of brahmins and to its distinctive feature is briefly made as follows: *brāhmaṇasya tapo jñānam, tapaḥ kṣatrasya kāranam; vaiśya syatu tapo vārtā, tapaḥ śūdrasya sevanam.* I.e., "Be it (stipulated) that the brahmin's function is to treat of sciences; that of kṣatriyas or rājās, to protect their peoples; that of merchants, to trade; that of śūdras or plebeians, to be servants." Again, there is the text beginning with the word *viprāṇām* which determines the end and benefit derived by each grade or class from its specific function: *viprāṇāṁ jñānato śraiṣṭhyaṁ kṣatriyānām tu viryataḥ, vaiśyānām dhānya dhanataḥ śūdrānām caiva janmataḥ* (2.155). I.e., "The consummate perfection of the brahmin is learning; that of the ruler is victory; that of the vaiśya or merchant is the accumulation of wealth; that of the plebeian is to live long." The same words recur in *Parāśara Smṛti* and are to the same effect.

Further, to prove that it is exclusively in this function of busying himself with learning that the brahmin's very essence is, so to say, enshrined — though this is sufficiently clear from what has been said — the same lawgiver shrewdly explains this when he declares that if a brahmin is lacking in learning (as is indeed the case of a good many of them), the name "brahmin" applies only equivocally. Here are his words: *yathā kāṣṭhamayo hasti yathā carmamayo mṛgaḥ, brāhmaṇas tu anadhīyānas trayaste nāma dhārakāḥ* (II.157). I.e., "An elephant carved in wood is called an elephant, the base skin stripped from any brute that animated it is called an animal; in the very same way, a brahmin who is without instruction is called a brahmin." all three only bear a name (i.e., the name of elephant, of animal, of brahmin). With reference to this passage, the commentator on *Manu* sets down the reason why the law refuses to regard as genuine brahmins such among them as neglect the pursuit of the sciences. Here are the words of the commentator, *anadhīyānaḥ avidvān nāma bibhrati na tasya pravṛttinimittam.* I.e., "The reason is that such men fail to live in conformity with the function that characterizes their order." By the same token, considering that an assembly of brahmins is denoted in Sanskrit by the term *sabhā* or *pariṣad*,[16] no gathering of uninstructed brahmins, be they even a thousand strong, could claim to be a *pariṣad.* So the same book stipulates in the following words, *ata ūrdhvam ye viprāḥ kevalaṁ nāmadhārakāḥ, parisattvam na teṣvasti sahasra guṇiteṣvapi.* I.e., "To such as are brahmins only in name (such men who lack learning, for the passage in question refers to them) the term *pariṣad* i.e., a gathering of distinguished men, can in no way apply."

Those passages in which the other orders are debarred from the pursuit of sciences make the same point. True, the royal families may legitimately attend lectures and instructions, as sanctioned by the *Parāṣara Smṛti*, in the text beginning with the word *prajānām*, etc., and by not a few other texts. This is a concession of learned teachers, here regarded as the specific mark of the man of culture and the distinctive function of the brahmin designated by

[16] I.e., a gathering of men of honored men, respected for their learning.

adhyāpaka, which is defined also by the author of *Per Met.*, chapter 1.[17] Such a thing is conceded to no other class, not even to the class of the rulers. So goes the ruling set forth in the text beginning with *trayo dharmāḥ* (X.77) and in a good many other texts. As far as the merchant class is concerned, these men hardly care to assist at the lectures, though they might, as I have said. Regarding the śūdras or plebeians, they are debarred from knowing even the alphabet of the Sanskrit language which, as I have explained, is the language in which the sciences are written. Nay more, knowledge in a plebeian is considered most harmful to the state. In support of this view they quote the following text: *snātam aśvaṁ gajaṁ mattaṁ vṛṣabhaṁ kāmamohitam; śūdram akṣarasamyuktaṁ dūrataḥ parivarjayet.* I.e., "There are four kinds of contact from which one must keep at the safe distance: a horse recently washed (said to be most vicious in that state), an elephant in rut, a bull under the same sexual urge, and a plebeian acquainted with the alphabet."

Other testimonies bear upon the same point, inasmuch as they give as the reason why the brahmin order surpasses all other social classes in dignity, the very fact that they are the masters of wisdom. Take for instance the much quoted text from the *Laws of Manu* beginning with *uttamāṇgod* (I.93) and other texts I shall adduce presently. I also refer you to some other texts in which it is enjoined on the other grades of citizens to honor the brahmin because he is wise and a teacher of wisdom. That is the reason which Manu, the political lawgiver assigns, as we shall see shortly; indeed, the higher the wisdom, the greater the honor, so that if anyone has mastered all the sciences, he is entitled to the highest honors. So it is prescribed in the text beginning with *laukikam* (II.117).

However, the fittest description of the brahmin — one that lists all the commendable qualities of the brahmin — is found in the *Parāṣara Smṛti*, in the verse beginning with *tapo damo*, etc. This description most faithfully recalls the portrait of the wise man which Tullius (Cicero) often draws in his Tusculan works and elsewhere, and which we find also in Seneca and other ancient

[17] This reference is not clear.

writers. Here are the words: *tapo damo dayā dānaṁ satyaṁ dharmaṁ śrutaṁ ghṛṇā, vidyā vijñānam āstikyam etat brāhmaṇalakṣaṇam.* I.e., "A love of work, a bridling of the passions, piety, liberality, truthfulness, fortitude, a learner's receptiveness (discipline), a compliant disposition, science, wisdom, a readiness to embrace truth from others (from any quarter) — all these elements enter into the definition of the authentic brahmin."

In this enumeration we note how neatly the progress of the wise man in his quest for wisdom is outlined. One must start with the proper equipment, namely with habits of self-control and the moral virtues; this is so either because without these no one can attain wisdom, or because these constitute the disposing and regulating part of perfect wisdom, as we shall show presently. Next, one proceeds to the acquisition of knowledge by attending lectures on some easier disciplines and on poetry. There then follows a sound training in the sciences. Thus, by successive stages one eventually reaches the goal of wisdom. However, even at this stage one should not so abound in one's own pride of self as to exclude the possibility of enriching one's stock of knowledge from what others have discovered in this field.

There is yet another definition of the perfect (or full-fledged) brahmin, set down in a *Laws of Manu*; it adds not a little weight to the remarkable statement given above, and like its predecessor appears on good grounds to agree with the definition of the perfect sage, as traditionally set down by our western writers: *brāhmaṇeṣu tu vidvāṁsaḥ, vidvatsu kṛta buddhayaḥ; kṛta vediṣu kartāraḥ, kartṛṣu brahmavādinaḥ* (I.97). This verse is to be taken along with the *smṛtaḥ* in the preceding verse (I.96). It means, "Among the brahmins those are reputed to excel and to be perfect who are really wise and proficient in the sciences; among the scientists, those who to other intellectual attainments add an expert knowledge of the ways of acting with uprightness or prudence; among these, such as actually behave virtuously; finally, those are perfect who are given to the contemplation of the true God." For the word *brahma* with the short final syllable — is taken to signify not any limited and false god, but God as such, in the most

comprehensive sense.[18] By fairly common usage the term does serve to denote that true unique and immaterial God who can be known by the light of natural reason. Since this is the case, I do not see what in this definition is lacking of those elements by which our Christian authors, e.g., St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae* I-II.3 and II-II.180, and other theologians too, define the happiness of the perfect sage. Indeed, do they not hold that the perfection and happiness of man in this life — where he is in a state of incomplete comprehensions — primarily and, so to say, essentially, consist in the contemplation of God, while secondarily and by way of preparation consist in man exercising himself in the speculative sciences, together with use of his practical intellect and the practice of the moral virtues?

Now all four elements are distinctly presented in the definition of the perfect brahmin I have adduced. Nor do I find anywhere in Indian books anything assigned to the brahmin that is higher in perfection and truly worthy of the name, unless perchance it be that he should progress in wisdom itself and daily add to his store by fresh and greater increments. So indeed the same book suggests in the following words, *ajñebhyo granthinaḥ śreṣṭhaḥ, granthibhyo dhāriṇo varāḥ, dhāribhyo jñāninaḥ śreṣṭhāḥ jñānibhyo adhyavasāyina* (XII.103). I.e., "In comparison with ignorant persons those excel who are well versed in the sciences; among scientists, those excel who attain wisdom; among the latter, those distinguish themselves whose experience in this field gains daily in depth and range." For that is precisely the forceful meaning of the word *adhyavasāyinaḥ* ("whose experience gains daily in depth and range").

Now in all these testimonies, I note in passing, there is nothing to imply that it is the specific business of the brahmin to handle professionally those laws which in part deal with idols, except insofar as in this land these laws too belong to the scientific studies and the brahmin's calling covers every field of learning. Nay more,

[18] *Brahma*, the neuter form, is usually written as *brahman* today, and so we shall write it in the following pages. Brahmā, with a final long "ā," refers to the creator god who is a personification of divine creative power.

the word *jñāna*, which is the proper word for wisdom and which is said to designate the sum total of the brahmin's distinctive task, includes neither the laws nor the knowledge of the false gods of this country (for "knowledge" is taken in a specific sense). It means wisdom which consists in knowledge of the sciences or, rather, it expresses the knowledge supplied by the light of nature about all things, and particularly about the one only God. By contrast, the science of laws is distinguished from *jñāna*, and is denominated by the term *karmam* [action]. Besides, as we shall see later, those laws are rejected by very many brahmins. Add to this the fact that not all of these laws are bad, but they constitute an aggregate of tenets, true and false, of precepts, sacred and profane, as will be seen later.

It so happens that these matters are occasionally listed among the subjects treated by the brahmins, as we have it in the *Laws of Manu*: *laukikaṁ vaidikaṁ vāpi tathā adhyātmikam eva ca, adadito yato jñānaṁ taṁ pūrvam abhivādayet* (II.117). I.e., "Remember to honor greatly the man who is versed in the sciences concerning the universe, i.e., the natural sciences, the science of laws, the science of God." So it comes about that in this land a man who is versed in the laws but has no acquaintance with the other sciences is not regarded as worthy of the name of sage. Nay more, the people are wont to make a proverb of the saying, *vedapāṭho nirarthakaḥ*, i.e., "He who has done nothing but dabble in laws is of no use whatever." This is a gibe somewhat similar to the disparaging note we in the West currently attach to Picrus the legal scholar and others like him.

Finally, when they say that it pertains to the brahmin to be conversant with the laws, they do not refer to the particular laws that we find here. It is a saying among the brahmins that there are laws beyond all counting, varying and multiplying according to each nation's particular genius. These laws (i.e., knowledge of them) however remain the specialty of the brahmins of every nation (i.e., those men in other nations who correspond to the brahmins of India). Hence this other proverb: *anantā vedāḥ*, i.e., "Innumerable are the laws." As to the particular laws which are the

precepts obtaining here, they are said to be restricted to India, as we shall see in Chapter Four.

From these and many more proofs I could adduce in support of the view I have advanced, it should be clear how undeserved and groundless is the condemnation a certain critic[19] passed on the brahmins, based on the unwarranted plea that the brahmins are nothing but teachers of the superstitious laws prevalent in this land. It has, therefore, been made sufficiently clear that the status and function of the brahmin consist in treating of wisdom as a whole. In virtue of their professional calling they truly are and may be called philosophers or wisemen, like those were labeled such by our ancient writers who — as tradition has it — contributed to the thought of Pythagoras and other philosophical documents.

But someone will object: are there not very many brahmins who are not only ignorant, but who also take up the occupations of the lower classes? Yet they are not without glory. Nay more, some them are governors of provinces and notables in the palaces of kings! I respond: in these parts, power and riches, be they ever so great, have absolutely no weight in acquiring a reputation of nobility or public regard. So, strange as it may sound, should a man of low extraction ascend even to the summit of power and command, he will never for all that induce people to pay him the same respect that they show to a high-born man, however poor he may be. In the same way, those among the brahmins who neglect the acquisition of learning and betake themselves to other occupations foreign to their calling, however much wealth and influence they may secure, and even if, thanks to the power or the favor of the princes they enjoy, they are not struck off from their class — such men will surely never command that recognition of nobility which is peculiarly the brahmin's own. On the contrary, they will be regarded as degenerate. The *Laws of Manu* in fact rules they should be regarded that way, in the passage which begins with the words: *vaiśya vṛtyāpi* (X.83). Should they engage

[19] Probably this critic is Gonçalo Fernandes, S.J., the missionary already established in Madurai when de Nobili came, and who differed from him on the methods of missionary work.

in works assigned to plebeians, they should be struck off from the class of brahmins, as *Manu* prescribes in the text which begins with the words *cikitsakān devalakān* (III.152)[20] and in the text beginning with *sadyaḥ patati māṁsena* (X.92). To perform such works is below the dignity of a brahmin, as is stated in the *Parāṣara Smṛti*, in the verse beginning *brāhmaṇaś cet kṛṣi*. Nay more, among the reasons that are deemed sufficient to exclude a person from the brahmin order are listed such deviations as trading, which pertains to the third order, and serving in the palaces of kings or doing military service, which belong to the second order. Here are the words: *śilpena vyavahāreṇa śūdrapatyaiś ca kevalaiḥ, gobhirasvaisca yanaiś ca kṛṣya rājopa sevayā* (III.64). I.e., "To engage in handicrafts, to go in for trade, to descend to the customary practices of plebeians (selling cows, horses, chariots), to do pastoral work, to make a living by transport, to undertake service with a king — all these are occupations forbidden to brahmins under pain of degradation."

Even the kingly function is ruled out. To prove this, apart from testimonies of a general import which declare forbidden for a brahmin any kind of occupation other than the pursuit of letters, we find a comment regarding this in the *Yajur* law book, the Śākhā section, 3rd Aṣṭaka, 9th Praśna, in these words: *na vai Brāhmaṇaḥ rāṣṭram ramata iti*. I.e., "It is indisputable that royalty is not in keeping with the brahmin's calling, since they are supposed to devote all their attention to the pursuit of letters."

In confirmation of these and many other testimonies add the common feelings of humanity and constant practice as well: for as a matter of fact, to this very day those brahmins who abandon the pursuit of letters and engage in occupations foreign to their calling, though they be notables at the courts of kings, do not hold the position of their order but are ranked with courtiers of lower extraction. Therefore they both receive marks of honor and bestow on plebeians marks of honor similar to those that are paid to themselves and to any superior, by joining the hands in a certain way against the chest; this is a form of greeting which the

[20] See section 5.2.

brahmins do not use towards people of lower birth. In their case, they use a less courteous form by holding out both open hands, joined together. To do otherwise is against the prescription of Smṛti which begins with the words *abhivādyai brāhmaṇais tu*. This passage will be adduced later on.[21]

2.2. Brahmins Command the Highest Esteem

The second proposition in this chapter is that the brahmin order is the noblest of all the orders in India. This should be clear enough from what has been said so far. Indeed, I have shown in the first chapter that the people here judge the nobility of a class from the specific function assigned to that class. They hold the knowledge of truth to be a man's foremost title to nobility, as indeed it is. St. Gregory Nazianzen[22] (to bypass other writers) on the occasion of the burial of St. Basil delivered himself in these words, "I consider that of all human goods the first place goes to erudition." This is a proposition which should be evident to all men of sound mind. It follows that brahmins, who claim possession of wisdom by hereditary right and by descent that dates back to the remotest antiquity, are to be recognized as the highest of all classes in nobility of birth and superiority of class. To be sure, so certain and so well-known is this fact here in India that my present feeling in proceeding to prove it is one of shame, and this feeling of embarrassment is the greater when I approach those men in this town who are learned in this subject in order to ask their opinion on the matter (as I have done on other matters as well). For I feel that on hearing me put such a question they will have a hearty laugh at my expense. But there is a certain critic, I am told, who has thrown out a challenge and proposes to show that certain social privileges enjoyed by the brahmins are granted to them by reason not of their nobility of birth but of their priestly character. On what ground he came to assign such a function to the brahmin order I am puzzled to know. Lest, however, I should appear to make light of

[21] In section 2.2.

[22] St Gregory Nazianzen (330-389) wrote a famous panegyric upon the death of Basil; it can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, volume 7. (Eerdmans, 1983).

him, as if his conclusion would necessarily follow were his contention regarding the priesthood admitted, I shall present several testimonies regarding this matter from the literature of this nation.

To begin with, let me produce one from *Manu*, a text which compares the various classes with one another. It runs as follows: *janma naiva mahābhāgo Brāhmaṇo nāma jayate.* I.e., "The brahmin who boasts that name is born to it by reason of his generation and his descent from a race of the highest nobility." In this text we should note particularly those two phrases, "by reason of his generation" and "is born to it", so as to make it clear that it is a question here of nobility by birth. Elsewhere in *Manu* he discourses about the respective nobility of the classes and compares them one with another. He speaks as follows: *brāhmaṇo vā manuṣyānām, ādityas tejasām iva; śirovā sarvagatrāṇāṁ dharmānāṁ satyam uttamam.* I.e., "Four beings boast superiority: the brahmins among men; the sun among the luminaries; the head among the members; truth among the virtues." Another text runs, *bhutānāṁ prāṇinaḥ śreṣṭhāḥ, prāṇināṁ jantunāṁ buddhi jīvanaḥ; buddhimatsu narāḥ śreṣṭhaḥ, nareṣu brāhmaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ, etc.* I.e., "What claims itself to be noblest on earth? Among things created, living beings; among living beings, animals; among animals, men; among men, brahmins."

The reason suggested in these books and in many other documents and rightly passed on is that the brahmin order is assigned to the pursuit of wisdom, which is the noblest of all pursuits, plus the task of teaching all mortals. By the same token, the reason why all the other classes are enjoined to honor the brahmins is that they are the noblest of men and that they exercise the noblest of functions, that of teaching the sciences, as (among other testimonies) the following text points out: *abhivādyai brāhmaṇais tu nṛpatir na kathācana svasti ityeva vadet vipraḥ, kṣaravid śūdrajātiṣu.* I.e., "Understand that the king is not entitled to receive from the brahmins that mark of greeting which goes by the name of *namaskāram* (which is done by joining the hands above the heart)." But that very mark of respect he must pay to the brahmin; once it is done, the brahmin in turn bids both kind and

any person of the other classes farewell. The brahmin's gesture of greeting, as I have indicated, takes a different form; i.e., he holds forth his open palms joined together.

The reason for the difference is explained in these words, *varṇāṇāṁ brāhmaṇo guruḥ*, i.e., "The brahmin is the summit and head of all the classes." For here the word *guruḥ* does not mean teaching authority [magisterium], but excellence and superiority. This is clear from what precedes and what follows. Immediately beforehand the Author says this: in respect of all forms fire is *gurum*, i.e., the noblest; the husband in respect of his wife is *gurum*, i.e., "superior," etc. However, by the words *tapo damo*, etc., in the preceding verse, he showed that the basis of the brahmin's eminence was precisely his possession of doctrine and his teaching of wisdom.

From this someone might possibly infer that in case the king were himself well-versed in the sciences, the brahmin would then be bound to show him that higher mark of honor spoken about above, as though there were parity of reasoning. But in the same Smṛti that sequence is rejected, because in the case of the brahmin the right of teaching wisdom is an inborn right derived by descent. Here are the words of the text: *abhivandya namaskuryāt kāyena manasā girā, brāhmaṇakṣatriyadyaistu śrīmadbhiḥ sādaraṁ sadhā brāhmaṇas sa abhivādās tu kṣitisāstu kathaṁcana jñāna karma guṇopetāḥ yatyapyete bahuśṛtāḥ.* I.e., "Let the king honor the brahmin by gesture, intention, and voice in the way he deserves, at any time whatsoever, however powerful the king himself may be. For the brahmin is of himself is honorable, i.e., in virtue of his inborn quality. That is not the case with the king, although he may well have acquired a goodly store of learning by dint of study." For the word *saḥ* ["he"] has an additional force of meaning, which certifies that due to himself, or in virtue of his genetic worth, the brahmin's stock is very honorable.[23]

[23] I.e., in the Sanskrit one reads "brāhmaṇas sa," and the "sa" — he — reinforces the reference to the brahmin: "the brahmin is *of himself* honorable..."

Therefore I do not quite follow the reasoning of my critic when he takes it for granted that in India the rulers are nobler than the brahmins merely on the plea that they take precedence over them in public affairs, and that it is only by exception every ruler cedes his position and rank of honor only to his brahmin instructor. If he means to say that the members of the ruling class are preferred to brahmins in matters of public affairs and administration and that in the honor of ruling and presiding they yield to none other, he is quite right; but he strays from the point I am making. I readily admit that all such business pertains to the second order, that of the rulers, and that it is quite foreign to the brahmin's calling, as has been explained above. But if he contends that in public places and assemblies, and absolutely speaking, the brahmins yield to rulers in position and honor, he is completely in the wrong and in direct contradiction to what the civil laws of the Smṛti collections quoted above clearly prescribe. For in those texts the reference is not to some particular brahmin teacher; it is quite general and applicable to every brahmin.

His contention, moreover, runs counter to the evidence of experience which proves that this law is observed in all its strictness. For all the royal nobles and princes in these realms and even king Chandragiri himself (who at present lords it over all) pay a mark of reverence of an order higher than the honor they themselves receive in the manner I have explained above, not only to brahmin instructors but to any brahmin who boasts a special possession of wisdom and is outstanding in doctrine. This is a definite recognition of the brahmin's accepted superiority. Excluded from such regard are those brahmins who have fallen away from their calling and have taken service at the courts, as I have said above in the paragraph which begins: "But someone will object.."[24] It is indeed true that neither the rulers nor anyone else for that matter will ever show anyone such signal marks of reverence as he reserves for his teacher, for these marks of deference are said to be of a special, highest order. They may, for instance, consist in joining the hands above the head or in

[24] See section 2.1.

prostrations on the ground. Again, throughout all these realms and at the very court of King Chandragiri, whenever learned brahmins attend court, they are offered better seats than are assigned to rulers, even if the latter are chiefs and court officers of the first rank, if they sit at all, which is hardly ever the case. I omit to mention the customs, the regulations regarding precedence, the prerogatives in the matter of eating and various other cultural observances, which constitute the more distinctive marks of nobility. In this respect the kings can never rise to a footing of equality with brahmins.

But enough of this. I have already expatiated too extensively on a subject which is universally known and which, in any case, is not necessary to my purpose. It matters little whether the superiority of the brahmin order over the other orders is admitted or not, since my only object is to show that the brahmin order is an order of learned men, and is such by reason of its particular grade and specific function. This is what I set out to show in this chapter and, if I am not mistaken, I have thoroughly proved it. Consequently, one further point: it is solely on the basis of their office as teachers of wisdom that the social privileges of the brahmins rest. This point will become even more evident later on, when I deal with some of their privileges.

Chapter Three

Concerning the Sciences which the Brahmins Pursue Professionally

I shall now take up in turn each single science which the brahmins pursue, so that, for one thing, more light may be thrown on what has been said so far only in a general way concerning the brahmins' professional duties and, for another thing, that it may be made quite plain what the brahmins' wisdom does not signify. For I have been told that a certain person has gotten it into his head to declare that all the sciences handled by the brahmins are tainted with superstition and concerned with false gods, for the simple reason that brahmins are Gentile teachers — as if it were impossible for wise men among the non-Christians to produce anything like a sound doctrine, such that even Christians could benefit by it.

Yet, we know for certain that no less a man than St. Gregory of Nazianzen admitted, in his controversy with Julian (the Apostate), that after he had mastered the divine doctrine he acquainted himself also with the wisdom of the Gentiles. We find the same in similar words in the writings of St. Ambrose,[25] *On the Faith* 3; in St. Jerome,[26] *Commentary on Galatians* 3; in St. Augustine,[27] *Christian Doctrine* 2. Moreover, the same St. Gregory in his funeral oration in honor of St. Basil makes a point which agrees with the common feelings of humanity when he says that among man's best gifts learning stands first. By this he means not just Christian learning, but also such learning as is found outside the fold (that is, among Gentiles), and he regrets that many Christians are misled into rejecting it on the erroneous plea that it is deceitful and pernicious and bound to estrange people from the true God.

[25] St. Ambrose (339-397)

[26] St. Jerome (347-420)

[27] St. Augustine (354-430)

As for the teaching of the brahmins, no one, I should think, is better fitted to prove whether all of it is superstitious or not than a man who daily moves in the circle of learned brahmins and has diligently handled and read their books. To begin with, I say that the brahmins handle quite a number of sciences. They call them *śāstras*, from the root *śikṣitam*, i.e., discipline, as we find in the text, *śikṣitam karotiti śāstram*. I.e., a discipline (a science) which turns out disciples is called *śāstram*. So *śāstram*, properly speaking, stands for science as found in the man who imparts it. Hence, a teacher goes by the name *śāstri*. By common usage, however, the term has been accommodated to mean any science, whatever the meaning attached to it, so that taken absolutely, it has come to denote the sciences properly so-called, and the liberal disciplines proper to the mechanical arts — for example the text *yuddhaśāstra śilpaśāstram*, i.e., "The art of warfare, the craftsmen's art," etc. In the same way we too are wont to use the term "science" for any distinct knowledge of anything whatsoever. The liberal sciences or disciplines pursued by the brahmins are the following.

3.1 The Science of Language

The first is *śabdaśāstram*, the science of words or the scientific grammar of this Sanskrit language. Here grammar is a distinct discipline extremely wide in range and difficult to master, so that few succeed in gaining a full command of it. For ordinary speech and writing in the Sanskrit language they commonly use a simple grammar, a sort of practical manual based on that science and learned by all. The whole subject matter of this *śabdaśāstra* broadly falls under the following headings. First, the value and nature of letters and syllables and their combination, since this language admits of many elisions of an intricate nature, which in conversation have to be carefully noted; second, nouns and verbs; third, their roots and peculiarities; fourth, the method of coining new words, a procedure very much in vogue here; fifth, adverbs and conjunctions; sixth, syntax, the arrangement of nouns and verbs. The whole of this discipline comprises seven stout volumes, not counting the dictionaries, which run to eighteen volumes, wherein are set down the meanings of words and, in some of them, explanations of their origins, just as in our dictionaries.

3.2 Literature

The second discipline is concerned with poetry, *kāvyam*, and this is divided into two parts. The first goes by the name *vṛttam*, and deals with the art of metrics. It lays down the rules for the various forms of poetic rhythm and their parts, since these people regulate the quantity of the syllables by the duration of the letters, so that it is no trouble to get some notion of that art.

The second part is called *alaṁkāram*, the art of invention, and this is poetry properly understood. This section comprises also what among us goes by the name of rhetoric and rhetorical rules, although manuals of rhetoric written in prose are scarcely in use among these people. For apart from the sciences, which are all written in prose, nearly all other subjects are expressed in verse or quasi-verse, even laws. Nay more, even in common intercourse and in social transactions it is customary for learned persons to end up any dealing with a metrical authority.

Under *alaṁkāram*, we have eight divisions to which all the rules and instructions concerning poetry are referred, whether they come under the title of "invention" or that of "elocution." The first division is named *śṛṅgāram*, meaning "ornament," a very extensive subject comprising not only all the means for adorning speech and various forms of description, but also methods of persuasion or dissuasion or of gaining confidence, as we shall see presently. The other seven divisions are concerned with influencing the emotions and regulating moral conduct. The second division is labeled *vīram*, meaning "fortitude;" under this heading they understand whatever bears on the habits of the rājā and military class and on the practice of the virtue of fortitude. The third division, under the title of *kāruṇam*, "mercy," deals with the various impulses of the heart. The fourth, called *hāsyam*, refers to plays, sports, comedies, and jokes. The fifth, called *adbhūtam*, refers to what provokes admiration. The sixth, called *bhayānakam*, refers to what inspires fear. The seventh, called *raudra*, describes acts of cruelty. The eighth, called *bībatsā*, treats of threats.

3.2.1 Further Distinctions in the Kinds of Poetry

In turn, the first of these eight divisions, *śṛṅgāram*, i.e., ornament, is subdivided into eighteen heads: *nagaram*, the description of towns; *ārṇavam*, describing the seas and what pertains to the sea; *śaila*, description of the mountains; *bhūmi*, description of the earth, etc.; *rājya*, description of kings and royal households; *āraṇyam*, description of forests; *svargam*, description of physical beatitude, as they conceive it, and also of any kind of beatitude one may hope for after this earthly life; *pātālam*, description of the nether regions; *narakam*, description of the pains of hell; *ṛtu*, description of the six seasons of the year — for they divide the year into six parts, as we do into four; *garbham*, description of man's conception and all man's stages of life --- for here they divide a man's life into five stages; *virāgam*, a description of the various affections of lovers when they are divided; *ādityavarṇanam*, description of sunrise; *astamanavarṇanam*, description of sunset; *candrodayāstamana varṇanam*, description of the rising and setting of the moon.

In addition to these, there are other descriptions so thoroughly subdivided that there is nothing in the nature of things which cannot be located under one or another of these headings. Following these descriptions there is an additional list: *utprekṣā alaṁkāram*, concerning metaphors and tropes; *vākya alaṁkāram*, about persuasion and dissuasion; *maugdhya alaṁkāram*, about the various emotions when they exceed certain limits; *kriyā alaṁkāram*, about sexual matters.

3.2.2 The Three Kinds of Poem

Furthermore, these people distinguish three main kinds of poem. The first kind is *kāvyam*. In common usage this term is applicable to that particular type of poetry which normally describes great characters and achievements worthy of imitation, and which thus corresponds exactly to epic poetry; there are very many poems of this type, both ancient and modern, and they run to considerable length. The second kind, called *nāṭaka*, closely resembles our tragedies and comedies, for here no sharp line divides the two. Some of these dramas present critical situations

involving princes, some treat of ordinary people, and the parts are played by various actors, as happens among us. There is one great difference, however: though the whole play is in Sanskrit, different dialects are spoken by the different actors, as appropriate to the part each enacts, so that it is very difficult to follow the development of such plays. The third kind deals with short poems, and these too abound in considerable variety, including elegies, odes, hymns, just as in Western literature, and other varieties, many of them composed in the wild manner of the dithyramb.

3.2.3 Historical Sources

Along with these poetical works we may well classify India's historical records, which they designate under the name of *purāṇas*, and all these too are written in verse. The chief and most ancient of the *purāṇas* are eighteen. These are regarded indeed by idolaters of various sects as sacred histories, because for the most part they embody the doings of those they consider to be gods. In reality, however, they are fictitious tales invented by poets; this is admitted by the brahmins of the atheist school and of the school of the wise, and by others too — including even very many from among the idolaters themselves.

3.3 Astrology

The third discipline bears the name of *jyotiśāstra*, i.e., astrology. The brahmins have a large collection of these books but, I confess, I have not hitherto given my attention to them, since I deem knowledge of this subject little conducive to the scope of saving the souls of the people in these regions. These books certainly contain ample evidence of the most careful observation of astronomical phenomena, for which our own writers in ancient times gave the brahmins credit; sufficient proof of this can be found in their astronomical almanacs or tables where eclipses and various concurrences of the stars have been accurately noted. They have also a complete system of laws, as has been noted more than enough.

3.4 Dialectic

The fourth discipline goes by the name of *nyāyaśāstra* or *tarkaśāstra*, i.e., the science of argument. This corresponds to our dialectic or logic or, rather, to an introduction to logic, since the proofs of logical conclusions and the subjects of investigation are treated in philosophy itself. This science is said to contain two parts: one, called *lakṣaṇam*, treats of definition; the other, called *parīkṣam*, treats of argumentation and the method of knowing. This latter part is in turn subdivided under sixteen headings. First, there is *pramāṇam*, the way or manner of knowing, and this is said to be fourfold: namely, *pratyakṣam*, clear vision; *anumānam*, inference from a simple middle term or sign; *upamānam*, knowledge by syllogism; *śabdam*, knowledge by faith.[28] Second, there is *prameyam*, the result of knowing, i.e., the knowledge resulting from the fourfold manners mentioned above. The third is *saṁśayam*, doubt. The fourth is *prayojanam*, purposes. The fifth is *dṛṣṭāntam*, simile. The sixth is *siddhāntam*, the conclusion of a true proposition. The seventh is *avayavam*, the five parts of an argument. The eight is *tarkam*, debate. The ninth is *nirṇayam*, perfect knowledge and a kind of comprehension. The tenth is *vādam*, the division of opinions and the posing of questions. The eleventh, *jalpam*, and the twelfth, *vitandam*, indicate two ways of arguing. The thirteenth is *hetu-ābhāṣam*, paralogisms and fallacies. The fourteenth is *chalam*, deductions which lead to something impossible. The fifteenth is *jāti*, form.[29] The sixteenth is *nigrahasthānam*, the conviction [of faults].[30]

3.5 Natural Philosophy

The fifth discipline is the so-called *Cintāmaṇi*. It corresponds to our natural philosophy and covers a fairly large range of subjects and interpreters. But the chief authors and what we might call the

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28 *śabdam*: literally, "word," knowledge due to the words of others.

29 de Nobili may be incorrect here; in Indian logic, jāti usually indicates an error in argument, a useless response, not (the otherwise standard) notion of "form" or "genus."

30 I.e., uncovering the faults in the opponent's arguments, so as to indicate the grounds for defeat.

standard texts are six in number: those of Gangeśa, Śailendra, Maṇikaṇṭa, Ganeśvara Dīkṣita, and Varadarāja,[31] plus the Paribhāṣam. All the others merely follow these, either to explain them and comment on them, or to question and oppose them. First among the standard authors, the one whose name is identified with the *Cintāmaṇi* is Gangeśa. His work comprises four bulky volumes and is explained by ten commentaries. It is divided into three main parts, along the lines of the three main ways of gaining knowledge: evidence based on clear vision; arguments based on signs; and hearing, i.e., by faith.

3.5.1 The first part, or rather the one that is tackled first, is the one described as the art of knowing by way of arguing from signs. It is called *anumānakāṇḍam*, and consists of twenty-six chief disputations: the first disputation is about what is concluded or consequent, *anumitivādam*; the second, about the simple application of the sign or medium to reach a conclusion, *anumānavādam*; the third, about a universal proposition made by joining the middle with the predicate so as to comprise many points, *vyāptivādam*; the fourth, about limitations on the universal, *utpattivādam*; the fifth, about the subject, *pakṣatāvādam*; the sixth, about the transposition or inversion of propositions, *kevalānvayavādam*; the seventh, about a subject without comparison or sign, *vyatirekivādam*; the eighth, about a subject which cannot be predicated, *anvayavyatirekivādam*; the ninth, about passive discipline or doctrine, *nyāyavādam*; the tenth, about inductions which may be incorrect in some way, *arthāpattivādam*; the eleventh, about the members or elements of an argument, *avayavavādam*; the twelfth, about the proposition to be proved or problem, *pratijñāvādam*; the thirteenth, about the major proposition of an argument, *yenedaṁvādam*; the fourteenth, about the proof of the major, *udāhāraṇavādam*; the fifteenth, about the minor proposition, *upameyavādam*; the sixteenth, about the conclusion, *nigamanavādam*; the seventeenth, about a wrong conclusion, *hetu-ābhāṣavādam*; the eighteenth, about an argument from a fallacious middle term, *sādhāraṇavādam*; the nineteenth, about an

[31] These are for the most part well-known logicians.

argumentation from a proper middle term, *asādhāraṇatattvavādam*; the twentieth, about a universal cause, *iśvaravādam*; the twenty-first, about particular causes, *kāraṇatvavādam*; the twenty-second, about effects, *kāryatvavādam*; the twenty-third, about material and formal causes, *samavāyakāraṇavāda*; the twenty-fourth, about that cause which is union, *asamavāyakāraṇavādam*; the twenty-fifth, about the effective and instrumental causes, *nimittakāraṇavādam*; the twenty-sixth, about arguing from a similar thing, *upamānavādam*.

3.5.2 Now let us turn to the second part of Gangeśa's *Cintāmaṇi* (which, however, actually stands first in the work itself). This part goes by the name of *pratyakṣa kāṇḍam*. It deals with evidence derived from clear perception and includes twenty-two main disputations. The first is *maṇgalavādam*, a debate about invocation, i.e., whether a work should begin with an invocation; against the atheist school it concludes that to give a work a happy ending, the deity need to be invoked; second, *padārthatvavādam*, which describes the process by which we come to know an object through the various senses; third, *svātāthyavādam*, about objects which can be completely known; fourth, *pramātvavādam*, about the apprehension of an essence; fifth, *angadehādivādam*, about deceptions in apprehending an essence; sixth, *prāmāṇyavādam*, about knowledge obtained by the four ways taught in logic, i.e., clear vision, the simple application of the middle, the syllogism, and faith; seventh, *pratyakṣavādam*, about the evidence which is defined as knowledge of a thing known in its own specific and natural form; eighth, *indriyārthavādam*, concerning the perception of an object through a sense organ; ninth, *samavāyatvavāda*, about the union of composites in general; tenth, *saṁnikarṣavādam*, about the union of faculties and their objects; eleventh, *svaprakṣyatvavādam*, about specific and natural forms; twelfth, *sarvichespacavādam*,[32] about knowledge of something as a whole; thirteenth, *saviśeṇapacavādam*,[33] about knowledge or understanding of something in its parts; fourteenth,

[32] The Sanskrit word is uncertain.

[33] The Sanskrit word is uncertain.

viśeṣaṇatvavādam, about the process of discarding from something defined what it is not, i.e., definition by negation; fifteenth, *upalakṣaṇatvavādam*, about knowledge from similitude; sixteenth, *anupalabdhivādam*, about lack of knowledge; seventeenth, *abhāvavādam*, about negation, privation, corruption; eighteenth, *bhāvavādam*, about being and essence; nineteenth, *vāyupratyakṣavādam*, about whether we can apprehend the wind; this section treats of the winds and other things made of mixed and imperfect elements; twentieth, *svarṇatejastvavādam*, information about metals and minerals; twenty-first, *udbhūtarūpavādam*, about the body in excellent shape; this deals with varieties of food and different genera of mixed substances; twenty-second, *mano-aṇutvavādam*, about the indivisibility of the intellect and of the soul of those who are reborn. Under these titles the author collects all the questions which bear on matter, which they call *vyakti*, on form which they call *jāti* or *samayam*, and on the movements of bodies and other objects related to logic and natural philosophy.

3.5.3 The third part of this *Cintāmaṇi* treatise, entitled the *śabdakāṇḍam*, deals with knowledge based on hearsay or faith, and is comprised of disputations which, for brevity's sake, I will not enumerate. The subject matter is partly metaphysical, partly ethical. Among the moral questions dealt with here is that most famous question which has perplexed every philosopher among nonbelievers throughout the ages, the question of man's natural beatitude. In this connection, the point most heatedly discussed is whether happiness consists in contemplation alone, or also in action.

What has been said about this first of the philosophical textbooks should suffice. From it one can gain an idea about the contents of the other five standard textbooks as well as the other manuals of philosophy. To present them all would take a great deal of time. This science and the one to be taken up next, which treats of God and is entitled *adhyātmika*, have this in common: they are both distressfully obscure. Indeed, just as all our own ancient philosophers, doubtless to impress people with a sense of respect due to so exalted a science as philosophy, shrouded their thought in

various ways — some like Pythagoras under the veil of symbols, some like Plato coming out with a theory of numbers, some inventing fanciful tales, some others falling back upon some other mystifying device — here too they turn the science of philosophy into a sort of mystery, particularly by a very disconcerting manner of speaking which consists in delivering themselves of a long series of words without any links among them.

3.6 Theology

The sixth discipline, called *adhyātmikam*, treats of God and theological matters. Among the brahmins we find not one but several schools of theology, each holding different doctrines according to the various religious sects to which they belong, as we shall see in the next chapter. The best known schools of theologians are three in number.

3.6.1 Buddhism

The first school is that of the Buddhists, who pose as atheists.[34] Their system is very subtle or, rather, bristling with fallacies, as we shall explain in the next chapter. Their conception of theology consists in this, that they jumble together all things divine and human alike. They have produced books on the subject, keep many on hand, and are certainly remarkable for erudition. As we shall see later, no academy in India has discoursed more subtly and more copiously on natural philosophy and on the other liberal faculties.

3.6.2 The Wisdom Tradition, Vedānta

The second school is that of the so-called *jñāni*, i.e., the "spirituals."[35] Their theology goes by the name of Vedānta, which

[34] Buddhism was probably not a living force in south India in de Nobili's time, but its intellectual views and the controversies they aroused were remembered and studied carefully.

[35] "*jñāni*" (Latin) literally means, "one with knowledge." de Nobili refers to them as the "spiritual," proponents of spiritual wisdom. Generally, *jñāni* is here translated as "the wise." Vedānta, which draws on the ancient Upaniṣads, is probably the most famous of the traditions of Hindu thought even today.

means the "end" of religious doctrine.[36] In this doctrine first place is given to that part entitled *Vivaraṇopanyāsa*,[37] which contains abundant information about the true God as known solely by the light of reason. The purpose of these theologians is to reject all idols and to investigate the nature of God solely by the light of reason. Hence, in this part, much space is occupied by a prolific refutation of the plurality of gods and of sacrifices offered to idols. Most emphatically do they attack what is called *fire sacrifice (yajña)*, of which there is question in the books of laws taught by the idol-worshippers in the sect of the proponents of *māyā*.[38] They also discourse on the rational soul, its immortality, and what they call the coexistence of a universal place called by the name of *vibhu* ["that which is pervasive"]. They also refute many of the theories propounded by the authors of the *Cintāmaṇi* mentioned above.

Next follows the part entitled *Tattvavivekam*, i.e., the search for the supreme truth, together with a commentary on it called *Advaita Dipikā*, i.e., the lamp of truth, which again and with many supporting arguments dwells on the oneness of God and the soul.

[36] Literally, the "end of the Vedic scriptures," i.e., the last section or the culmination.

[37] *vivacanasya utpadyam* in the original is unclear; we have conjectured *Vivaraṇopanyāsa*, a Vedānta text by Rāmānanda Sarasvati, a 17th century scholar living in south India.

[38] Vedānta thinkers traditionally considered knowledge superior to rites, and on occasion engaged in polemics against the ritualist worldview. The "proponents of *māyā*" (māyāvādins) is normally a polemic appellation applied to the proponents of the Nondualist (Advaita) school of Vedānta by its opponents, and not to a school distinct from the Vedānta traditions. The nondualist theologians rely heavily on the notion of *māyā* as a mysterious intermediate power between the absolute, changeless Brahman, and the thoroughly dependent finite realities of the perceptible world. To their opponents, *māyā* is an unsatisfactory and makeshift conjecture which implies that the world is merely an illusion.

Added to these there is a third part entitled *Bhedatikkāram*, a title which indicates the exclusion of multiplicity in God and the soul.[39]

In these three parts the Vedānta theologians explain just about all the divine attributes, stressing their absolute character. For instance, they show that God is a self-subsistent Being, that he is eternal, immaterial, that by his nature he is God, that he exists everywhere and that he is the cause of every being. But their theology is not restricted to these parts. There are other sections which I have not yet seen, and a plethora of books. Indeed, new books appear daily, and in our day there lives an eminent author who keeps writing on these subjects with penetrating sagacity.

However, among these theologians there are still differences of opinion. For example, in their statements about God some confine themselves strictly to what they can discover by the light of reason even though, deprived as they are of the light of faith, they are apt to fall into error here and there, each in his own way. Others, on the contrary, reach out beyond what has been said about the true God and introduce into the essence of God some material element they call *māyā*, by means of which, they say, God creates all things. This *māyā* is said to possess a twofold energy, one by which God creates souls, and the other by which he creates bodies. The reason underlying this *māyā* theory is their stout contention that "nothing can come from nothing." Further, their opinions differ also on the matter of the soul. Some hold, like Plato, that there is one soul common to all and existing from all eternity and present in all men, but also that, depending on the former, there is another soul which animates individual persons and which too is endowed with immortality. This they call the *jīvātman*. Still others have it that all souls are severally and newly produced by God from the material element I have mentioned above, and that these individual souls serve God in order to work miracles, should he wish, and to animate the various bodies. On each of these tenets too we have various theological doctrines and not a few books.

[39] We do not know of a text entitled *Satyaviveka*, but there is a *Tattvavivekam* by Nṛsiṁhāśramin, a 16th century Vedāntin living in Maturai, who also wrote the *Advaita Dipikā* and the *Bhedatikkāram*.

3.6.3. The Idolaters

The third theological school is patronized by the worshippers of idols, i.e., those who acknowledge a multiplicity of gods and uphold them in the manner set down in their laws. Their teaching can broadly be divided into four sections named, respectively, *Bhāṭṭa*, *Prābhākara*, *Śāstradīpikā*, and *Mīmāṁsā*.[40] All of them are concerned with giving an account of those false propositions, recorded in their ordinances, which are concerned the various deities and the sacrifices offered to them. Nevertheless, in interpreting the ritual laws the fourth section, Mīmāṁsā, is decidedly critical on many points and rejects any efficient cause for the world's existence. Moreover, both the third and the second sections in all their writings adopt an attitude of very sharp opposition to the principles of the adherents of the first section, the atheists. This clearly proves that the first section goes farthest back in time of origin.[41]

3.7. The Seventh Discipline: Knowledge of Laws

The seventh discipline has to do with the knowledge of laws, and is variously denominated according to whether it treats of this or that other body of statutes. There is no uniform code of laws bearing on what pertains to religion that is applicable to all brahmins, and this varies according to each sect. Hence I prefer to deal with this matter of the laws after I have gone over the list of brahmin sects, which will be done in the next chapter.

3.8 The Eighth Discipline: Moral Laws

The eighth discipline is labeled *dharmaśāstra*, which means moral science or principles of conduct. But it does not present new

[40] These are standard Mīmāṁsā references: Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Miśra were important 8th century writers, while the *Śāstradīpikā* is a commentary by Pārthasārathi Miśra (11th century) on one of Kumārila's key works. Since the Mīmāṁsā system is generally indifferent toward the existence of gods and does not engage in idol worship — instead it adheres to the old rituals — it is striking that de Nobili includes them among the idolaters, perhaps due to their commitment to the performance of rituals which maintain the ancient Vedic polytheism.

[41] The Buddhists were traditional and early opponents of the Mīmāṁsā thinkers.

subjects for investigation since, as I have explained, these are covered in philosophy. Hence, this discipline has been labeled more appropriately by others and by the author of *Smṛti* as the *Nītiśāstram*, i.e., the code of civil law. It is comprised of a certain collection of civil prescriptions and practices which are either found here and there in the various law books I have mentioned, or gleaned from other sources. They have been prescribed in this realm and have the force of law obligatory on all. These books also contain rules regarding the distinctions of offices and class differences, together with their different customs and cultural observances, and also whatever pertains to the government of the community of citizens and of the realm.

No wonder that brahmins well-versed in these subjects are consulted by kings when they have to decide something. We truly find in these books a good many prescriptions regarding both the individual realm, i.e., the civil virtues of individual persons, and then too the duties of the householder.[42] This is perhaps the reason why this discipline has been dubbed "moral science."

There is also found among the brahmins *Āyurvedam*, the art of medicine. This is a work written in Sanskrit, fairly bulky and subtle, plus other arts of a less liberal character. In fact, although these are due to the invention of the brahmins, the brahmins themselves are forbidden to practice them, as we have seen above and shall see again below. Now then, let what I have said concerning the sciences which the brahmins are wont to handle suffice. Next, I shall give a brief account of the various sects prevalent along them, so that what has been said regarding their theological tenets may be better understood. These explanations also throw light on many other points I shall touch as we proceed.

[42] The "individual realm" and that of the "householder" are respectively the "monasticum" and "oecoenomicum."

Chapter Four

Concerning the Brahmin Sects Viewed from Their Religious Standpoint, and First of all About the Buddhists, The Sect of Atheists

The most famous and most ancient of all the sects in India is the one they call *bauddha matam* or *nāstikam*,[43] which represents the sect of atheists. Lest anyone should pronounce unwarranted my statement that this sect is most famous and most ancient, I will proceed now briefly to substantiate both points of my contention.

4.1.1 The Most Famous Sect

First, I prove that this sect is most famous, i.e., it has been rendered illustrious by men of outstanding character and bearing. This is sufficently evident from the very titles that are bestowed upon the learned teachers of this sect in such writings as Amarasiṇga's work, and the *Liṇgapadyam*, the *Śabdaratnakāram*, the *Cintāṇgini*, the *Vyajayati*, and not a few other works. The first title of distinction is that of *sarvajña*, from the words *sarvam*, meaning "all," and *jñāna* meaning "wisdom," thus, "possessed of all wisdom." The second title is that of *śukadhara*, "dwellers in the shrine of intelligence." The third is that of *buddhāḥ*, men who set at naught all worldly goods. The fourth is that of *dharmarāji*, ranking as kings due to every kind of virtue. The fifth is that of the *tathāgatas*, men possessing truth and intelligence. The sixth that of the *samantabhadras*, men esteemed for goodness and every virtue. The seventh is that of *bhagavāni*, men commendable to the highest degree of the six praises: perfection, fortitude (*vīryam*), renown (*śasyam*), distinction (*stis*), wisdom (*jñānam*), and freedom from every mental disturbance (*vairāgya*). The eighth title is that of the *malajit*, men who have subdued all greed and lust. The ninth is that of *lokajit*, conquerors of the world. The tenth is that of *jina*, victors. The eleventh is that of the *ṣaḍabhijña*, men endowed with six remarkable gifts of perception: i.e., most perfect sight (*divya cakṣuḥ*), most perfect hearing (*divya śrotam*), ancestral renown (*pūrva ghira*), excellent memory (*saṁsmṛti*), inborn power of insight into the intentions of other men (*paracittajñānam*), and a most keen ability to verify the soundness of one's own opinion (*āścāryapakṣavṛtti*). The twelfth title of distinction is that of *daśabalam*, those distinguished for ten qualities: i.e., continency (*dānti*), patience (*śānti*), good nature (*śilam*), fortitude (*vīryam*), the habit of contemplation (*dhyāna*), mature judgment (*saṁdhi*), strength (*balam*), aptness to plan the right way of going about an undertaking (*upāya*), reverence (*praṇidhi*), and wisdom (*jñāna*). The thirteenth title is *advaitavādi*, i.e., those for whom all things are one, for they say that all is vanity.[44] The fourteenth is *vināyaka*, which can indicate either free men subject to no master, or princes among masters, or learned teachers, since *vināyaka* admits all three interpretations. The fifteenth is *munindra*, chief among those who renounce human concerns. The sixteenth is *muni*, learned men.

I will spare you many other names of this same honorific type, not to prolong the list. Those I have enumerated suffice to show what renown and high standing for learning the leaders of this sect enjoy. Nor do I wish that people should wonder that titles of such distinction were conferred on men who pose as atheists. For, as I have pointed out above, these men have left remarkable writings on natural philosophy and on the other liberal sciences, while their works have added singular beauty to the Sanskrit language, and to Tamil as well. As to skill in arguing, they are deemed so shrewd and so well-versed in subtle dialectics that it has become a popular proverb to say, *puttan pole yukti colrān*, i.e., "He argues with the subtlety of a Buddhist." Since this sect glories in being most ancient and since once upon a time it lorded over all these realms, it is little wonder that the fame of perfect wisdom should have adhered to it and should continue to do so even to this day.

[43] Literally, *nāstikam* means "pertaining to the view 'that there is not'" — i.e, a denial of God or the gods, and a denial of the authority of the Veda.

[44] The proponents on nondualism (*advaitavādi*) are usually understood to indicate not Buddhists, but the nondualist school of Vedānta mentioned above.

4.1.2. The Most Ancient Sect

Now we come to the second proposition I have undertaken to prove, i.e., that of all the sects established in India the sect of Buddhists boasts the remotest antiquity. My first proof is gathered from an historical work, entitled the *Jina Purāṇam*, in which it is recorded that not only the brahmins of this realm, but the entire region together with its ruler (who bore the common and hereditary name of Devapāṇḍya) were at one time Buddhists or atheists; that subsequently, after a long period of time, there arrived from some northern region a company of men who brought with them that body of laws now current among the brahmins of the idol-worshipping class and preserved by the proponents of *māyā* (as I will show later on); and that, by healing the king from a fever which he happened to contract and by doing certain other notable deeds that seemed miraculous, these men converted the king and a large portion of his subjects from the teaching of the Buddhists to the worship of idols that is now commonly practiced.

A second obvious proof in support of the antiquity of the sect of Buddhists is the fact that there is not a single book of the sacred sciences used by the other brahmin sects which fails to attack this particular sect, the Buddhists and their doctrine; strictly speaking, they could not possibly do this unless the Buddhist sect was older than their own. For how could they attack or even conjecture sects that were non-existent in their day, cropping up only after their time? Finally, because the academy of the Buddhists dates so far back, the Buddhists are said to be related to the sun or born along with the sun; this is as much as to say that the appearance of the sun in the world did not precede, but was contemporaneous with, the birth of the Buddhist sect.

4.1.3. Buddhism is Not a Heresy or Offshoot of Hinduism

The data given above thus make it clear whether the sect of the atheists can correctly be described as a heresy sprung from the precepts of those idolaters or dependent upon them, as I hear some honorable gentleman has supposed. The supposition is obviously wrong, since long before any such precepts appeared, the teaching of the atheists had been in vogue and held these nations under their

sway, as it does even now to some extent. It is clear under yet another heading that the sect of the atheists cannot be said to be a non-orthodox offspring of the sects of idolaters, i.e., the fact that these sects do not agree in any of their tenets, just as the sects of the wise have nothing in common with these same idolaters, as we shall see presently.

Second, and consistent with the point just made, we can see why these laws of the idolaters never explicitly prescribe or ordain the use of the thread, the *kuṭumi*,[45] and other distinctive badges in vogue here, but instead content themselves with determining the manner in which they are to used, just as they do regarding any other civil practice, as I will explain further on. The explanation is that the actual use of these distinctive badges is anterior to the laws regarding them. Add to this that nowhere in the *Yajur*, nor in those respectively called the *Ṛg*, *Sāma*, *Atharva*, *Śukla Yajur*,[46] nor in the so-called six *Sūtras* which constitute the earliest lawbooks in use among the idolaters, do we find a formal precept making it obligatory for brahmins to wear the thread, nor for kings or others who are wont to wear it. What we find is only the ritual form to be used in imposing it for the first time, just as we find there the ceremonial for marriage, the manner of taking food for the first time, the customs regarding dress and other merely social usages kept by the followers of such sects, as will be explained later.

4.2. Concerning the Wise

In the second place I must list the various sects or classes of the so-called wise or spiritual men. Their object, as noted in the previous chapter, is to run down the multiplicity of gods and the sects of the idolaters. For they maintain that there is one all-embracing cause for all things, which they prove both to exist and to be unique, particularly from the production and the order of the world. This tenet of theirs has been perfectly and comprehensively expressed by Cittiyār in a single Tamil stanza. It runs as follows:

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[45] The *kuṭumi* is the brahmin hair tuft, discussed below in Chapter Eight.

[46] These are the schools of the Veda: there are two schools of the Yajur Veda, the Black (Kṛṣṇa) and the White (Śukla).

oruvanoṭorutti onrenruraittiṭum ulakam ellām; varumurai vantu ninru povatum ātalāle; tarupavan oruvan veṇṭum tānmutal īrum āki; maruviṭum anāti muttar citturu manni ninre. I.e., "The world is made up of three classes objects, masculine, feminine, neuter; some are born, some remain, some perish. Their cause is One who must be without beginning, without end, self-subsistent, self-contained, eternal, blissful, the prototype of intelligence." This is my firm belief, says Cittiyār.[47]

Therefore, all the wise reject every kind of sacrifices to the gods; some go so far as to refrain from making offerings even to the one true God whom, they contend, should be adored only in spirit. Besides, they maintain, sacrifices offered here on earth by idolaters, be they brahmins or others, are of no use in obtaining eternal glory. Nay more, on this point they argue that the laws of the idolaters are self-contradictory. While in many passages the idolaters extol the merit of sacrifices, in the *Yajur*, first Āraṇya, they deliver themselves as follows: *na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaikenā amṛtattvam ānaśuḥ*;[48] i.e., "Neither because of sacrifices, nor by begetting many children, nor of wealth or of bountiful alms giving, do men attain final beatitude." But in the preceding chapter under the second heading I have discoursed about the wise and their theological doctrines, so I deem it idle to expatiate on the subject in this chapter.

4.3. Concerning the Idolaters

In the third place I have referred to the sects of the idolaters. The chief and most famous among them are four in number. The first is that of the proponents of *māyā*, who hold in equal honor the three gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra.[49] All sovereignty abides in them in such a way, however, that the first is credited with creating

47 This is the first major verse (after the introductory verses) in the constructive part of *Civajñānacittiyār*, a key Tamil-language text of the Śaiva Siddhānta school of south Indian Śaivism, dedicated to Śiva as the supreme lord. The ensuing section of *Civajñānacittiyār* is dedicated to elaborating this verse.

48 The *Nārayaṇa* appendix to the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 12.3.

49 Rudra, otherwise known as Śiva. The nondualist Vedāntins were content to see all three deities as manifestations of a higher and simpler reality.

everything the world contains, the second with the government of the world, and the third with its destruction. As for the many other gods they also worship, some are described as sons of the supreme gods, others as their servants, others as heroes.

The second sect of the idolaters is that of the devotees of Śiva. Of the three chief gods they select one, namely Rudra, and set him up as the supreme deity. They assert that the two others, as well as the minor gods, represent Rudra under various names which accord with the various functions he discharges. The third sect is that of the devotees of Viṣṇu; in a like manner they single out one of the three, namely Viṣṇu, and view all other gods as subordinates, as his attendants, or else consider them as Viṣṇu himself under different names. The fourth sect is that of the proponents of the Real,[50] who likewise attribute to Viṣṇu alone the supremacy of power and divinity, while differing on certain points from other devotees of Viṣṇu.

Besides these main sects there are others of minor importance, such as the Lokāyatas,[51] who hold the view that the elements themselves are god; the Candravādis and the Suryavādis, who (respectively) make the moon, the sun and other luminous bodies[52] into gods; the proponents of *māyā*, who teach that spirits and immaterial forms are gods; the Vāmas, who attribute divine nature and supreme dominion to the goddess Śakti;[53] the Sigivageras,[54] who hold everything visible to be divine, and other sects too, each holding its own views.

But, as I have said, the sects which enjoy the greatest vogue and whose followers are most widely distributed among the idol-

50 The *tattvavādins*, who follow the views of the "dualist" Vedānta thinker Madhva, who defended a strict disinction between God and the created world.

51 Generally understood to be the ancient Indian materialists, the Cārvākas.

52 An additional word here, *pubra*, is uncertain.

53 A reference to practitioners of tantra, who engage in socially unacceptable ("lefthand" acts, *vāma*) and who worship the Goddess as power, *śakti*.

54 This term is uncertain.

worshipping population at the present time, are the four sects: i.e.,the proponents of *māyā*, the devotees of Śiva, the devotees of Viṣṇu and the proponents of the Real. The oldest of these is that of the proponents of *māyā*, who, as I have said, hold the three higher gods in equal veneration. It continued in unbroken unity up to the time of that great Master, Śaṅkarācārya by name. He had three distinguished disciples who broke away from him and were established as heads of three new sects:[55] the first, Rāmānuja, founded the sect of devotees of Viṣṇu; the second, Madhva, started the sect of the proponents of the Real;[56] the third, whose name was Śiva, if I am not mistaken, established the sect of the devotees of Śiva.[57] This much suffices concerning the said sects. As they are so commonly known, I deem it superfluous to adduce any written testimonies. It remains only to add a few notions regarding the various laws to which sects of idolaters adhere.

4.4 Concerning the Laws of the Idolaters

4.4.1. The Laws of the Brahmins are Innumerable

Now that the particulars of the various sects have been set down, it is easy to move on to discourse about their respective laws. That is why, instead of explaining them in Chapter Three where they properly belonged, I have deferred treating them until

[55] Śaṅkara is the famous 8th century teacher of non-dualist Vedānta, and although he was not the teacher of the later Vedānta masters mentioned here, certainly they worked out their positions in response to his. In the 11th century Rāmānuja taught a moderate version of Vedānta in which the world exists as distinct from God, yet only within the divine reality; in the 13th century, Mādhva worked out a version of Vedānta which stressed the radical difference between God and the world. There are versions of Vedānta with a religious affiliation dedicated to Śiva as lord, and perhaps de Nobili has these in mind in indicating "Śiva" as a founder for the Śaiva Vedānta. Scholars today would agree that the Non-dualist school is the oldest of the established schools of Vedānta, but not that it is the original school from which all the others are derived.

[56] The Tattva-vādins, "proponents of 'reality'," are the followers of Madhva's essentially monotheistic tradition, recognizing Viṣṇu as the sole supreme Lord.

[57] The Śaivas worship Śiva as supreme God, but only in a broad sense would trace their religion to the God Śiva as their founder.

now. On this subject of the laws, my first statement is to the effect that the laws which the brahmins treat of in their teaching are on their own showing innumerable; this contention of theirs rests on that classical dictum, *anantā vedāḥ*, i.e., "Innumerable are the laws." Presupposing that in various countries there are various recognized customs and cultural practices in both the civil and the religious fields as well as various religions, they conclude that there are likewise various collections of written laws intended to mold both the religious and the civil life of each particular state or community, laws drawn up in various Granthas, i.e., various classical languages. They rightly maintain that the knowledge of these laws, the study of which forms a distinct branch of learning, is the privilege of the brahmins, i.e., the wise men, of every country. This is confirmed in the *Laws of Manu*, where the author shows that the laws which obtain here are confined within the limits of the "middle land," i.e., of India. The text runs as follows: *etaddeśa prasūtasya sakāśād agra janmanaḥ, svaṁ svaṁ caritraṁ śikṣeran pṛthvyāṁ sarva mānavāḥ* (2.20). I.e., "The brahmins born in this region and all the other people inhabiting the same region naturally instruct one other in these laws and prescriptions and keep them faithfully." Immediately there follows a text showing which region is meant and, consequently, within which limits these laws are valid. The words are the following: *himavad vindhyayor madhyam (cikṣanta) yat prāg vinaśanātapi, prāyagāc ca madhya deśaḥ prakirtitaḥ* (*Manu* 2.21). I.e., "All the region comprised between the Himalayan mountain range (to the East) and the western province constitute the 'middle land.'" Therefore, our people admit that the laws obtaining here have no force in regions situated farther away to the north, but that other laws hold sway there, and so too in other lands.

As for the true law of Christ, which we profess and which is written in a different Grantha — i.e., Latin — and brought here from distant lands, we have never in common talk heard it ill spoken of on the score that we have introduced a law or type of learning inconsistent or incompatible with the status of the brahmin class. Rather, criticism is based solely on the plea that we are substituting a new law because we oppose the one prevalent

throughout India. Thus in the case of two of our newly converted brahmins who boast the title of learned teachers and who now openly profess the teaching of Christ, a teaching different from what they professed before: the non-Christians never blame them on the score that they profess an alien doctrine held by their particular sect.

4.4.2. Not all Brahmins are Adherents of the Laws

My second statement is to the effect that insofar as the Indian nation itself is concerned, not all brahmins are adherents of the laws. In particular, there are those members of the atheist school I have spoken of. These men, far from approving any of these laws, go to the length of rejecting or questioning the very possibility of any law. Talk to them about a religious law, and they are skeptical about it, since they reject all faith and knowledge by faith. For them all knowledge worth the name is restricted to knowledge by inference or by intuition. Many of them indeed admit of no other means of knowing than that produced by clear perception and clear evidence; such is the case with the atheists of the Cārvāka group. Neither, besides, do those so-called wise men, of whom we have spoken before, acknowledge these sectarian laws. On the contrary, guided by the light of reason they employ themselves strenuously in overthrowing and doing away with all those prescriptions and the innumerable gods. Those laws, then, which here go by that appellation, are kept only by brahmins of the idolaters' class, and even those laws differ according to the different sects I listed previously. Just as the devotees of Viṣṇu and of Śiva and the proponents of the Real have broken away from the dogmatic tenets of the proponents of *māyā*, they too have broken away from their religious prescriptions and have taken to themselves regulations of their own.

4.4.3. The Laws of the Proponents of *Māyā* — Their Nature

Now then, to start with the proponents of *māyā*: their laws are older, more generally observed, and better known than the others, so much so that by metonymy these are designated simply as "the laws." They are four in number, the *Yajur*, *Ṛg*, *Sāma*, and

Atharva.[58] A fifth collection, the *White Yajur Veda* (*Śukla Yajur*) by name, hardly differs from the others in its formulation of the precepts. I omit to give a concerted enumeration of the sections and subject-matter of these law collections, both because they hardly serve my purpose and because the contents lack order and definition. Indeed, dealing as they do with well nigh every possible thing, they are little more than a disorderly congeries of various opinions bearing partly on divine subjects, partly on human subjects, a jumble where religious and civil precepts are miscellaneously put together. So, apart from what is said here and there about the gods, the sacrifices offered to the gods and superstitious rites, e.g., the entire section entitled the *Saṁhitā*,[59] etc., these books deal a good deal with such topics as the elements, the sun and other matters of the kind, without mentioning that they are gods, as we see in the *Yajur Veda* beginning with the words *athādhilokam*.

There are many other items referring to customs about meals, dress, habitation, the administration of cities, the insignia of the various castes and their usages; e.g., in the *Āpastamba Sūtra*, or about singing in the same Āraṇya (i.e., the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*),[60] a text beginning with *śikṣāṁ vyākhyāsyamaḥ* (*Taittirīya* 1.2), where the author discourses about truth, veracity, the exercise of virtue, thanksgiving, returning like for like in doing good. Moreover, many texts refer to the real cause of the world' s existence, and to God's oneness, such tenets in fact as might go to enlarge the doctrine of the sect of the wise, and give these a handle for proving the laws to be self-contradictory. There are those, too, as may well

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58 Here, again, de Nobili takes the ancient Vedas as law texts, although today we might judge them more broadly to be texts of rubrics, hymns, and a variety of rules related to the central rituals of Hindu life.

59 I.e., the old collections which today we identify as "the Vedas;" probably de Nobili has in mind the major collection, the *Ṛg Saṁhita*, which is a collection of the hymns addressed to the various gods in the course of ritual performance.

60 In this paragraph the Sanskrit quotations are from the first and second chapters of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. They are possibly the first citations by a European from one of the sacred, carefully guarded Upaniṣads.

and should indeed be acceptable even to Christians. Take for instance the following texts of the *Àraṇya* law book where, in referring to the nature of God, the author describes him as *ṛtaṁ tvā bhagaḥ*, i.e., "Good of his very own nature," as *jñānam anantam brahma*, i.e., "Infinite understanding," and as *ākāśa śarīraṁ brahma*, i.e., "of an ethereal form" ("ethereal" meaning "spiritual"), for that is how these people describe a spiritual quality positively, in much the same sense as Orpheus did when he spoke of God as an ethereal substance permeating space; see Lactantius, Book I, Chapter 5.[61] More generally, however, these people define a spiritual quality by using a negative term *aśarīri*, i.e., incorporeal. When they refer to the divine attributes, they speak of God as being by his very nature, or of himself, true and truth itself. Here is the text: *tvam eva pratyakṣaṁ brahmāsi, tvam eva pratyakṣaṁ brahma vadiṣyāmi, ṛtam vadiṣyāmi, satyaṁ vadiṣyāmi.* I.e., "You are God.." (note that the term *brahma* [*brahman*] with short final syllable is the name most commonly used for God; and it differs from Brahmā with the long syllable, which properly indicates one of those three false gods I have mentioned above.) In this text, on the contrary, the term used is always *brahma* [*brahman*] with the short final syllable, because it refers to God in the true and absolute sense). "You, I say, are God and resplendent light itself; I call you God, the resplendent light itself; I call you true, I call you truth."

Finally, they refer to God as truly rewarding the just, in these words *brahmavid āpnoti param* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1); i.e., "He who knows this God will secure glory." But, what is yet more surprising, I discover in these texts even an adumbration of the recondite mystery of the most Holy Trinity, the most gracious and most high God who without a doubt vouchsafes even to these far distant lands some inkling of the most hidden secret of our faith through the teaching of some sage living among these people, in much the same way as by a rather mysterious inspiration he deigned to illuminate the Sybils, Trismagistus, and certain other masters of human wisdom in our part of the globe. The text runs as

[61] Lactantius (240-320) wrote the *Divinae Institutiones* against 3rd-4th century texts critical of Christianity.

follows: *sa ya eṣontara hṛdaya ākāśaḥ, tasmin ayam puruṣo manomayaḥ antarena tāluke, ya yeṣa stana iva vā lambate sendra yoniḥ* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.6). I.e., "That very person within is in his nature spirit; in him is one who is likewise spirit, existing through an act of the will; he who exists through the mouth (i.e., the Word), is held close to that person's breast (i.e., as son) — that person is at the same time Lord and cause of things."

4.4.4. The Author's Opinion on the Vedas

From all this and plenty more which for brevity's sake I omit, it is obvious that these same laws represent nothing else but a collection of various opinions which a variety of learned men have brought forth on a variety of subjects, each in his own sense; and that subsequently the proponents of *māyā* assembled them into a whole and set them down as their law, caring little whether they were on the whole consistent or at variance with one other. That such indeed has been the origin of these laws, can frequently be ascertained from the very manner in which the laws are formulated. Thus in the Āraṇya section, under the heading Upaniṣad, after a lengthy dissertation about God we are treated to the following conclusion, *iti prācīna yogyopāsva* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.6), i.e., "All these sayings come from wise men in the east." Similarly in the 5th *Praśna*, at the end of a number of chapters, we read the following information *iti ṛṣir avocat* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.7), i.e., "This has been said by one of the seers" who renounced the world. Shortly afterwards it says, *iti Triśaṇkor vedānuvacanam* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.10), i.e., "All this is from a person named Triśaṅku." Again, in the *Saṁhitā* section, 5th Kāṇṭam, 2nd Praśna, we are told, *viśvamitrasya sūktaṁ bhavati*, i.e., "This saying is by Viśvamitra." These and similar saying appear in various places throughout these law texts. But the merit of collecting all these sayings and views given out by wise men goes, they say, to a certain author named Vyāsa, so the collection is also known as *Veda Vyāsaḥ*, i.e., the Law of Vyāsa.

Hence, when some brahmins who are proponents of *māyā* contend that these laws are truths existing by themselves, this claim stands in direct and utter conflict with the very contents of

the laws; no less foolish is the claim of others who set down as the author of the laws either Rudra or Viṣṇu or Brahmā. Obviously, since for one thing the law texts themselves proclaim the fact that their authors are men, and since for another thing, the sayings they record are in striking contradiction with one another, they cannot possibly be derived due to inspiration by one and the same deity. To be sure, the learned among the brahmin idolaters will not contest either of these statements, but they have recourse to this invention to ensure reverence in respect of their laws and to enforce their observation among the people, a common enough stratagem used by lawgivers. For it was with a similar end in view, as is well known, that Minos issued the laws he drew up for the Cretans from the cave-shrine of Jupiter, as though they were dictated to him by Jupiter; that Lycurgus pretended that the laws he imposed on the Spartans had Apollo of Delphi for their author; that Solon declared that the laws he prescribed for the Athenians had come to him from Pallas Athene; that Numa, when drawing up the laws of the Romans, gave out that he was instructed in them by the goddess Egeria in nightly interviews. Nor were these alone in commending their laws under the pretense of receiving them from a deity. Others followed suit, each pretending to be under the influence of some god or another, all intent on binding their subjects to obedience to the laws, not from an ungodly motivation but a religious one.

A second conclusion to be drawn from what has been said about these laws is that they are not to be condemned altogether. Rather, they can well be retained insofar as they propound moral ideas or social subjects. Much less should we condemn as superstitious and addicted to idol-worship all those who have secured the degree of doctor of laws in this field, or who teach that science (as I have explained) insofar as it is morally tenable and refers to merely social precepts. From this standpoint, these laws cannot be set down as exclusively pertaining to one particular sect. Should you condemn these laws as a totality on the score that they are regarded, albeit falsely, as received on a superstitiously divine authority, by the same token you must condemn well-nigh all the laws derived from non-Christian states, and in a large measure still

in force even in our day. You must condemn all the Papirian laws which to a great extent were either confirmed or written by Numa, as well as ten out of the Twelve Tables of Rome, and those transcribed from the Tables of Draco, of Solon and Cyvengi. The same holds good also for the assembly of the Areopagus, for the kings and ephors of Sparta, and for the senators of ancient Rome, for whom the legal profession meant that they were dedicated men and priests.

But my opponent will object that these Indian laws deal with the idols of this nation and with sacrifices offered to idols in the manner of the sect of the proponents of *māyā*. Granted — but what of it? Are they on that account also to refrain from dealing with profane and merely social matters? Are they not discoursing abundantly about folk customs? Are they not saying many things that are compatible with the true Religion, some specimens of which I mentioned a little while before? Are these to be forsaken because those other things are to be shunned? Are the good people among the brahmins to reject the pearls that are found in these laws, and to throw away the excellent principles they can learn from them, because evil men among their class rake up from those same law collections things that reek of the dung pit?

As a matter of fact, the laws of those states to which just now I referred also treat of sacred things, at considerable length. Indeed, among the statutes listed in the Twelve Tables those which laid down the sacred or, let us say, the superstitious Law of that age, stood foremost and were of primary importance. Furthermore, Aristotle in his *Politics* censures those laws in which nothing is prescribed regarding sacred things — i.e., reverence due to the gods and sacrifices offered to the gods — on the plea that in every well and wisely ordered state great store is to be set by what concerns religion and sanctity. Who ever said that the rulers and magistrates of those ancient city states, or those wise men who professed expert knowledge of those laws, were on that score men dedicated to the gods, or that they were by reason of their very office superstitious men? Or was there ever any Christian pontiff who compelled great men of that type, when they are converted to

the faith, to renounce the magistracy or the judiciary or to give up the dignity and honor inherent in eminence in the knowledge of the law?

Now the case of Indian laws in no way differs from that of those other laws, for not only do they contain to a large extent material that is common and of a social nature, but in fact and in practice they are, with respect to such materials, quite common, still in force and still obligatory on all, in exactly the same way as those other civil laws which constitute the bulk of the Smṛti collection with which I dealt in the previous chapter.

When, on the other hand, these laws are qualified as distinctly particular to the sect of the proponents of *māyā*, even then the qualification applies only to the sacred portion of them. I.e., after the advent of the devotees of Śiva, the devotees of Viṣṇu, and the other sects mentioned above, the religious content of these laws was retained only by the proponents of *māyā*. As to the main civil and moral regulations, these naturally continued to be current in this region among those people who of old received them from their kings. Even now, with respect to these same regulations, both the kings and the members of the other orders, to whichever sect they may belong, still consult learned brahmins whenever an occasion presents itself.

As for me, if I have chosen to discourse on the subject of these laws, it is not that I deem it important to defend all that they contain. For even if the knowledge of these laws as a complex whole be regarded as objectionable, this would not be a valid reason for condemning the teaching of the brahmins as a whole, seeing that it covers so many different branches of learning and ranges far and wide, as I have shown above. My only intention is to caution against extending our condemnation beyond what is proper, and to allow the truth to have its say in any subject whatsoever

4.4.5. Laws of Other Sects

The specific law of the devotees of Śiva goes by the name of *Āgama*. Its main purport is to set forth in detail all that pertains to the god Rudra, one of the higher deities listed above, and to determine all the sacrifices and rites that refer to him. However, there are also many civil observances mixed up with these, which do not find favor with the common masses of citizen, but are in force solely among the devotees of Śiva. The laws of the Vaiṣṇava sect are called *Tiruvāymoḻi*; they are short in comparison with others, nor do they contain anything common to the general public. The laws of the proponents of the Real are called *Mādhvabhāṣyam*, and are of the same nature.[62]

There is, however, one feature common to all these laws, i.e., that they are mutually destructive, particularly so the laws severally adopted by the devotees of Śiva, the devotees of Viṣṇu, and the proponents of the Real. Each sect holds most tenaciously to its own code and rejects the others. True, they take over certain laws from the proponents of *māyā*, even regarding worship, but only insofar as they deem them to favor their own positions. Since, on the one hand, the laws of the proponents of *māyā* prescribe religious rites which may apply equally to all three superior gods, and since, on the other hand, the sects that are of a later date each selected its own favorite out of three, each finds in the doctrine of the proponents of *māyā* certain factors that suit its purpose, even if there are many more which prove to be at variance with it. If you happen to ask them how they can consistently confirm their own tenets on the authority of the laws of the proponents of *māyā* which, by their own account, are untruthful on a good many points, they answer that those sacred laws are like an ocean in which it is permissible to look for precious stones and large gems, even if the same element also gives rise to many foul animals and monsters.

4.4.6. Brahmins are Wise Men

So let us have done with the subject of the laws and the subject of the sciences tackled by the brahmins. From what has been said

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[62] *Tiruvāymoḻi* is a Tamil devotional work comprised of 100 songs, totalling 1102 verses. It could be said to be a law book only indirectly, in that sense that Vaiṣṇavas shape their lives according to it. The *Mādhvabhāṣyam* would be quite different again, probably the theological commentary of Madhva on the basic Vedānta theological text, the *Uttara Mīmāṁsā Sūtras*.

you may judge whether the teaching of the brahmins as a whole is tainted by superstition and wholly oriented towards idols, as a certain gentleman suspected, or whether, as I am told another of my critics has suspected, the raison d'étre of the brahmin lies in the fact that he is professionally a doctor of law, i.e., of the religion of idolaters.

To sum up. First, the brahmins in their teaching, as we have seen, embrace such a large variety of sciences and disciplines which cover very extensive fields. Second, the brahmins deal with the laws only insofar as they constitute a part of general knowledge and learning, and thus claim the attention not of all brahmins, but only of a minority, i.e., the idolaters' group. Third, some of the law books are concerned with civil law of the commonest type, such as the Smṛti law books. Fourth, those very laws, (i.e., the lawbooks of the proponents of *māyā*), which are declared by metonymy to be "the laws," are neither entirely superstitious nor in their entirety the distinct monopoly of one peculiar sect, since to a large extent they are common to all by reason of their purely civil and moral character, in actual practice, and with the same force as the other civil laws contained in Smṛti. For these reasons, let it be a sure and firmly established fact that the brahmin order is of itself none other than an order of wise and learned men, wise with a wisdom understood in general terms. This has been handed down to us by the testimony of our own ancient sages.

Chapter Five

Concerning the Priesthood of This Nation

It remains to supply some information regarding the priestly office as understood and performed in this country, so that my readers may have a better knowledge of the country, and so that the truth of what I have been contending all along may shine out with greater evidence, i.e., that the brahmin stock is merely a class of learned men and is consequently free from the taint of superstition. For I have it on hearsay that a certain gentleman is suspicious of the brahmins, believing on the strength of their social status that they are nothing but priests of the idols commonly worshipped in these parts. He believes, moreover, that by the same token the thread which is the distinctive mark of the brahmins is of a superstitious character. I shall consider later on the concluding proposition in his argument; for the present, I shall tackle the premise by showing which class of men form the priestly class in this country.

5.1.1 There is Priesthood only in the Idolater Sect

To begin with, it should be noted that whatever I shall bring forward in connection with the priestly office in this land is to be restricted to the several sects of the idolaters of which I have spoken above. Indeed, the brahmins of the Buddhist or atheist school are consistent in their practice of throwing everything into confusion. Therefore, on this issue too they hold the view that there is nothing like sacrifice or priestly office of any kind, and that no sign of reverence or form of worshipful deference is admissible other than that which one pays to one's teacher. The same may, broadly speaking, be said about the various sects of the so-called wise or spiritual men. For as we have seen, this school rejects all fictitious tales about idols and recognizes only one God as known by the light of reason. Therefore, in this school too, neither is any form of sacrifice prescribed nor is there any need for a particular priestly profession. Furthermore, they go so far as to hold it unlawful to offer sacrifice or to erect a shrine or altar even to the one true God since, as I have said before, they hold that God

should be worshipped only in spirit, since he is pure spirit. Hence the point at issue will be discussed solely within the limits of the sects of idolaters, among whom many types of sacrifices are in common use. Our business will consist in determining to which grade of citizens or clan among these sects the function of the priesthood is assigned.

5.1.2 Common Sacrifices

Now then, this vexed problem can be considered from two angles. One is whether the term "priest" is taken absolutely to designate a person who performs sacrifices in honor of the gods. The other is whether it is taken to designate one who, set apart in virtue of a specific rite for the purpose, officiates at sacred functions in public temples, or one who resides there and sacrifices both for himself and for the public. If the question is viewed after the first manner, it has been said that absolutely all these heathen idolaters, to whichever racial group they may belong, are priests, because one and all are entitled to offer one or another type of sacrifice to the idols, and they all do so daily, either by immolating sacrificial animals or by sacrificing some other offerings.

But, to proceed in an orderly fashion, I shall describe the various types. First of all, there are certain sacrifices which anyone can perform, whatever his caste may be. Such are the sacrifices prescribed in honor of the household gods, called *kuladevarkaḷ*, i.e., caste deities. They consist in immolating rams, as is the practice of the lower castes, or in offering pulses, pod fruits, or tree fruits, or other gifts of the same kind, as is done by the higher castes.

5.1.3 The Oblation

A sacrifice which is common to all the castes is the one they call "oblation." It is offered to the god Agni,[63] whom they regard as a kind of mediator god with respect to all the other gods, and through whose beneficial intervention, they say, all the other gods are appeased. The rite consists in casting into the fire various kinds

[63] Fire

of corn, butter, honey, certain species of wood reserved for this religious function, and other articles. Since this is the case, I am surprised to hear that a certain critic of mine goes about exclaiming that "oblation" is a kind of sacrifice peculiar to the brahmin class, since daily experience demonstrates the contrary and since written testimonies from various books prove that all castes, whether brahmins, or rulers, or vaiśyas (i.e., merchants), or śūdras (i.e., plebeians), are indiscriminately authorized to perform oblations.

Indeed, the lawbooks bear ample testimony that the merchants and rājās are thus authorized. So, for instance, in the *Yajur* lawbook, Śākhā section, 1st Aṣṭaka, 1st Praśna, reference is made to this oblation, inasmuch as it is a sacrifice preparatory to the fire sacrifice. The ruling reads as follows: *vasante brāhmaṇo agnim ādadhīta, grīṣme rājanyaḥ ādadhīta, śaradi vaiśyaḥ ādadhīta.* I.e., "In that season of the year which is called Vasanta (i.e., in the months of March and April) let the brahmins perform the oblation in honor of fire; in the months of June and July, let royal families perform it; in the months of August and October, let merchants perform it." The rule runs as follows regarding another type of oblation which all three castes perform in the month of August after the fire sacrifice: *śrāvaṇyaṁ paurṇamāsyam amavāsyaṁ paśubandhanaṁ yājayet.* I.e., "In the month of August at the New Moon or at the Full Moon, let them celebrate the oblation which is called *paśubandham.*" Similarly, all three castes are enjoined or allowed, on the fifteenth day of each month at the new moon and at the full moon, to celebrate that form of oblation called *darśapūrṇamāsa*, if at any time previously they had performed the fire sacrifice. If they had not, they should perform the *sthālipāka* oblation, as we read in the *Āpastamba Sūtras*, in the fifth kāṇḍa of the first householder section. So again, regarding the oblation, which is called *agrayaṇam*, and which these three castes perform when the rice crop is ripe, we find a ruling recorded in a *sūtra* of the *Ṛg* law book. Likewise, regarding the oblation dubbed *kuṇḍaleṣṭi* which is performed at the earring ceremony, there is a reference in a *sūtra* of the *Ṛg* law entitled *Āśvalayanam*, near the middle. Regarding the oblation performed on the son's birthday, the reference is found in the same text. Regarding the oblation

called *upanayanam*,[64] a reference is found to this in the *Āpastamba Sūtra*, in the first householder section. So on and so forth — it would take too long to enumerate other passages.

That, on the other hand, it is a very well known fact that neither brahmin nor ruler nor merchant is allowed to perform the oblation for another, but only for himself, and that, should he do so, he must be regarded as fallen from his own social status and as degraded to the level of the one in whose favor he sacrifices. This is explained in the *Laws of Manu* in the following text: *dakṣiṇārtham tu yo viprah śūdrasya juhuyāt haviḥ brāhmaṇas tu bhavet śūdrah, śūdras tu brāhmaṇo bhavet*. I.e., "If a brahmin induced by greed for money should perform an oblation for a śūdra, i.e., for a plebeian, let the brahmin be a śūdra, let a śūdra be a brahmin." Here the author sets forth an extreme case, namely of a man of the highest status sacrificing for the sake of a man of a very low order, so that for the same reason and after the same manner we might decide about other cases affecting the intervening social grades, as indeed the learned brahmins are doing. Moreover, what I have said concerning the oblation applies *a fortiori* to the fire sacrifice, a higher form of sacrifice about which I will say more presently. In fact, it is chiefly with reference to this latter sacrifice that the above rule is to be understood. For the oblation is, so to say, a preparatory sacrificial ceremony, and quite a number of oblation-like rites concur with the fullness of the fire sacrifice. If it is then prohibited to offer the oblation for others — otherwise described as the "transaction of fire" — this prohibition applies primarily to the complete sacrifice, i.e., the fire sacrifice.

On the other hand, it is perfectly clear from common usage that the oblation may also be performed by plebeians. Nor is there any need for my proving it with respect to the veḷāḷas and the paṇḍārams of the other, lower castes. For these men do perform the oblation both on their own behalf and on behalf of others of any caste whatsoever, as I shall show further on. Moreover, the veḷāḷas

[64] This is the rite of investiture with the sacred thread, undergone by brahmin, kṣatriya, and vaiśya boys.

contend that it is particularly to themselves that the following text applies, one found in the book entitled *Palavākyattiraṭṭu* and culled from the precepts of the Āgama: *nārcātiyuḷ āyic cirilān āyic cāra eykkini kāriyam tannaip purintu, tantramantram carrum tavarānāki pāril mikka karuṇaiyanāy, iruppān tān parama tikṣaikkuri kuruvākap pakar*. I.e., "The man who is sprung from one of the four orders, i.e., from the orders of brahmins, rulers, merchants, śūdras alias plebeians, who has subdued all impulses to anger, who correctly performs the ritual of fire that is the oblation, who has an unerring command of the rites and prayers, who is endowed with solid piety and is faithful to the ritual form and the ceremony of Rudra — that man may rightly be called a teacher." This text refers to the sect of the devotees of Śiva. In truth, the veḷāḷas hold that they themselves are distinctly and chiefly meant by the appellation of the fourth order, namely that of the śūdras; for this they rely perhaps on that traditional text (*āgama*) that goes by the name of *Kāraṇa* and begins with the words, *brāhmaṇo kṣatriya vaiśya ityādi*.[65] There it is stated that it is to be carried out by a plebeian of good standing. Now among the plebeians the veḷāḷas hold the highest rank. As a matter of fact, other groups too, however low they may be in the social scale, also perform the oblation, at any rate when the sacrifice is intended to bring about a punishment, or to gain vengeance or some other evil effect, as is attested by one and all in common usage and daily experience. A peculiar feature of this sacrifice consists in that we may almost credit it to the account of women, since they cook the rice and offer up certain other gifts in honor of the sun. With this point I have done with the kind of sacrifices common to all the classes.

I come now to those categories which are less universal and peculiar to distinct orders of citizens. The first in order is the sacrifice they call *Dūrga pūjā*, i.e., sacred to Śakti.[66] This sacrifice is offered exclusively by people of inferior rank, namely soldiers and satellites of the royal army. They perform it on the feast of Māhānavami in the month of August, in the presence of the king. It

[65] Reference uncertain.

[66] The female divine power, the Goddess.

is offered to the goddess Śakti whom they consider to be the mother of the gods. It runs for ten days in succession according to the following order: the first day, they sacrifice one buffalo and a hundred rams; the second day, two buffaloes and two hundred rams, and so on, so that on the tenth day the sacrifice consists of ten buffaloes and a thousand rams.

There are moreover a number of gods at whose sacrifices only men of the plebeian class are allowed to officiate: such are Ayanar, Piṭāri, Vīran, Balabadra, Badra Kāḷi, Gurunāthan, Śantivīran and others. If brahmins wish to obtain a favor from these gods, they have to ask the plebeians to offer a sacrifice to them on their behalf, since the plebeians are wont to conduct all these religious services for themselves and for others. It is superfluous to confirm all these statements from written authorities and testimonies, as anyone can see them every day and everywhere.

5.1.4 The Fire Sacrifice

The fire sacrifice, on the contrary, is reserved to members of the aristocracy, i.e., brahmins, rulers, and merchants. This too is on the condition that each one performs it for himself alone, i.e., for his own personal attainment of the bliss of the so-called heaven. To offer it for others prohibited. As for proof of the right accruing to each of these three classes to offer the fire sacrifice, an innumerable array of texts from the law books is available, confirmed besides from not a few historical records.

Thus, for instance, it is recorded in the book entitled the *Rāmāyaṇa* that king Viśvamitra performed this fire sacrifice. So did king Dilipa, as recorded in the *Raghuvaṁśam*, and so too king Raghu in the same book, and king Devaśvara in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Additional instances are to be found in other documents, as we have here a wealth of stories and legends. As for texts which show that to conduct the fire sacrifice is quite in keeping with the status of royal families, we have the statute of the *Yajur*, Śākhā section, which was mentioned previously when we were treating of the oblation, and there other references in many other passages too.

Mention of the same subject is found in the *Laws of Manu* in the following words: *yajeta rājāḥ kratubhiḥ* (*Manu* 7.79). I.e., "Let the king conduct the sacrifice." So too, there is the text which begins with the words, *prajānāṁ rakṣaṇam* (*Manu* 1.89). Reference to the vaiśyas is found in the verse beginning *paśūnām rakṣaṇam* (*Manu* 1.90), as well as in *Padma Purāṇam*, in the verse beginning *svādhyāyaṁ yajñānām*, etc. That the fire sacrifice should not be offered on behalf of others, but should be performed strictly for each one's own interest, has been proved previously when dealing with the oblation. Nor would it be lawful for brahmins to do so. For one thing, the brahmins themselves entertain no doubt on the subject, and for another, in support of their attitude they quote the current saying found in the commentary on the Mīmāṁsā law book: *jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeta*, i.e., "Whoever desires to obtain the happiness of *svarga*, let him perform the fire sacrifice." But we shall treat this subject matter presently.

5.1.5. The Horse Sacrifice and Other Particular Fire Sacrifices; the Lack of These Special to Brahmins

Finally, there is that type of fire sacrifice they call *aśvamedha* sacrifice (*yāga*),[67] the topmost, most outstanding, and most respected of all. It is permissible only after quite a number of other sacrificial preliminaries of the common fire sacrifice type have been gone through. It is appropriated by the ruler group, as can be ascertained from the *Yajur* lawbook which records many sacred ordinances on this subject. The reference can be found in Śākhā section, 3rd Aṣṭaka, 8th Praśna, beginning with the words: *ayam rājārvatram vadhyād iti.*

So too, from among the other orders there are some who have entrusted to them forms of sacrifices peculiar to themselves. In the case of the brahmin order, however, I am unable to find any species of sacrifice that can be set down as peculiar to them even as private persons. The only thing I find exclusively assigned to the brahmins in the law books of the proponents of *māyā* is the task of

[67] The Horse Sacrifice (Aśvamedha) was in ancient times performed by kings as part of their establishment of their domain; it involved a climactic sacrifice of a horse.

instructing the priests on the manner of performing the particular sacrifice called the fire sacrifice (which, as I have said, is common to all the three orders), and on the manner of conducting that particular type of fire sacrifice which is in use among the kingly order. The reason, of course, is that the performance of said sacrifice involves so many ceremonies imposed by the laws that it can hardly be carried out without proper guidance. Now we have seen that the specific task of teaching all the sciences, inclusive of the science of the laws, devolves solely upon the brahmins, and so they alone come to know all these subjects thoroughly. Kings, who at best can only attend instruction on scientific subjects but are unable to master them so as to teach them, are also absorbed in administration and army organization, and are not supposed to be versed in the ritual to be followed in performing sacrifice, as I have explained. Hence, the laws prescribe that the priest must be instructed by a competent brahmin in the way of conducting the fire sacrifice service. But this is not self-evident, since it may well happen that a king or a merchant may prove himself to be a most remarkable man who, merely by listening to instructions, may acquire a high degree of competency. In that case he can do without the brahmin's direction and will sacrifice by himself, as did king Viśvamitra in offering the sacrifice of Triśaṇku, as recorded in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

My first proposition is thus established and done with: if the term "priest" is taken in the first sense (i.e., absolutely), then there is not a single individual among the idol-worshippers here in India who is not a priest, to whatever class he may belong. For in that sense, everyone offers sacrifice. Indeed, for that matter, the same practice prevailed of old among idolaters of our own countries, as anyone who is not altogether ignorant of historical records knows well enough. If then you call the brahmins a priestly caste on the score that they are entitled to perform the fire sacrifice and the oblations — albeit on condition that they do so each for himself alone — why not, on that very score, call the kings and merchants priestly castes, seeing that these same sacrifices are common to them? Why not qualify the plebeians of every caste as priestly people, and the women as priestesses, seeing that they all go in for

sacrifices of their own? Certainly, you would have good reasons to describe womenfolk as priestesses, and all plebeians and royal families as a priestly race, reasons better than those alleged in the case of the brahmins. The sacrifice the brahmins are allowed to perform, for one thing, they have in common with all the rest, and, for another, they are bound by the laws to offer for themselves exclusively. Insofar as women are concerned, however, they themselves come near to offering as their own the sun sacrifice I have spoken of. Insofar as the plebeians are concerned, these people claim many types of sacrifices as distinctly their very own, to be used for both their own benefit and that of others. Finally, regarding the kingly class, they too boast a sacrifice exclusively reserved to them, namely the *aśvamedha* sacrifice.

5.2. Concerning the Official Priesthood

If by "priest" in the true sense we agree to indicate a person who is set apart for this office in virtue of a peculiar rite and ceremony, who makes it his business to offer sacrifices of any kind both for himself and for the general public in public temples, or who is constituted guardian and manager of temples and temple property — then this is tantamount to saying that the priestly class is drawn neither from the brahmin order nor from that of the rulers, nor from that of the nobler set of merchants, but is made up of two categories of men, both of them regarded as inferior to these three superior orders. The first category consists of men they call the Śaivadvijas and the Nambis.[68] It is among these two distinct groups that the priesthood described above is held to be strictly hereditary by genetic descent. But they regarded by brahmins as equal to śūdras i.e., plebeians, a social grade we have listed above as the fourth grade in the social scale.

As to the first statement, that the Nambis and Śaivadvijas are the public priests of temples and their official guardians, this requires no particular proof on my part. As to the second statement, that they are initiated into this priestly office with a peculiar rite

[68] The Śaivadvijas are upper caste devotees of Śiva; the Nambis are devoted instead to Viṣṇu.

and definite ceremonies, a clear proof is found in the Āgama under the title *Hautripadam*,[69] where there are prescriptions bearing on this topic. The text will be found lower down[70] and is universally known. That these men are members of a peculiar and well-determined group is also a fact commonly known. It finds expression in the following Tamil verse taken from the *Śaivottama Āgama*: *vaitikar perinuṁcaiva tikṣaiyai vāykkave, taṇkaiyināl pārtta liṇkam tiṇṭutal kaṭanoravānalla, vaiyakaṁ tanakku nācam varum ivar tiṇṭil, cutta caivarāl parikārattai camaikka nūl puriyumāṟāl.* I.e., "Though a learned man may have been admitted into the sect of Rudra, he is not allowed to touch, be it even by accident, Rudra's image which is called the *liṇgam.* [For the sacrifices in honor of Rudra are paid to this image.] Should he touch the principal image [the one set up in the temple], a great calamity will assail the earth. Let the crime be purged by religious rites at the hands of one from the Śaivadvija priestly group, according to the Āgama."

Again, we can show that the members of this group are excluded from the brahmin class, i.e., the first order of citizens, and that, moreover, genuine brahmins regard these men as on a level with śūdras, i.e., plebeians. For this there is that striking text from the *Laws of Manu* (III,152) which says: *cikitsakān devalakān māṁsavikrayiṇas tathā, vipanena ca jīvanto varjyāsyuḥ havya kavyayoḥ*. I.e., "Medical practitioners, priests, meat vendors, grocery shop managers, all such people must be expelled from the families of brahmins." From this it is clear that the priestly profession was ranked with other plebeian professions. There are also the testimonies of learned brahmins bearing witness to this as to other matters; these are found separately recorded at the end of this document [in the appendix].

Finally, there is the evidence based on the practice of these same brahmins. Not only do they refuse ever to admit priests to their social intercourse, but they even maintain that the very sight

[69] Or Anutripadam; uncertain.

[70] In 5.4.

of them is contaminating. Hence the rule that if a brahmin happens to cast his eye on a priest, he should look up to the sun in order to wipe out the defilement contracted by such a sight. Should he touch the body of one of them, he is directed to bathe. Hence the familiar saying: *madhyānhe devalaṁ dṛṣṭvā ādityam avalokayet*, etc. I.e., "Should anyone chance to cast eyes on the public priests of the gods, even at midday, let him look up at the sun." So too, the following: "Should he come in contact with the body, let him bathe." Note that the mention of the time of midday adds emphasis to the injunction, since they think that defilement from seeing a priest at midday is hardly even possible.[71] The *Parāśara Smṛti* pretty well explains that the condition of the official priests is no better than that of the parayas, the lowest in the social scale: *citāmcacitikāṣṭamcayūpaṁ caṇḍālam eva ca, spṛṣṭvā devalakaṁ caiva savāsā jalam āviśet.* I.e., "Should anyone touch the wood which serves for or is prepared for the burning of human bodies, or the stake to which the victim to be slain in the fire sacrifice is attached, etc., or if anyone should touch a paraya or a public priest, let him wash both his clothes and his body." Again, in another text, the author says this: *caṇḍālaṁ pretad dhūmamca mṛta sūtakinam tathā, śavaṁ devalakaṁ caiva sacelam snānaṁ samācaret.*. I.e., "If anyone chances to touch a paraya, or to come in touch with the smoke of an incinerated body, or with one wearing mourning garments on the occasion of his father's or mother's recent death, or with the corpse itself or, finally, with an official priest, let him be washed clean."

Finally, far from brahmins being allowed to function publicly as priests, whether in temples or elsewhere, and far from the priestly caste being numbered among the brahmins, brahmins are not even allowed to enter the inner part of the temple in which the idol and altar of sacrifice are kept. Should anyone dare to enter, he is ordered to be expelled from the brahmin order as one befouled and degenerate.

[71] I.e., in the middle of the day there would be no reason to visit a temple where one might see a priest. Temple visits normally occur in morning and evening.

Nor does it matter that the common people call these priests "Śiva brahmins," as if they were brahmins of the God Rudra and even if as such they wear the thread, the distinctive mark of the brahmin. For the common people are wont to bestow on many who are not real brahmins the name "brahmin" which belongs to the learned or the members of the first social grade. People are perhaps misled by a resemblance in outward elegance and dress, inasmuch as these too wear the thread. So they speak of Koṇkaṇi brahmins, Śivai brahmins, Komaṭṭi brahmins[72] and others, all of whom belong to the merchant class, i.e., the third grade of citizens, and come after the royal families. As a matter of fact, the thread is worn not by brahmins alone, but also by rulers, merchants, and several other groups of which I shall speak later.

5.3 Why are Priests Considered Low in India?

But someone will object, as I myself did object in speaking to the brahmins, that in other countries and races the people's priests and public curators of sacred edifices are held in the highest esteem. How is it that here in India they are ranked inferior, or at any rate, deemed unworthy to be compared with the highest nobility? My answer is the answer they themselves gave me. First and foremost, we have that large body of brahmins belonging to the Buddhist school and school of the wise; these utterly reject all idols and the priests who serve them. Next, we have the brahmins of the idolaters' school, and these say that according to a custom prevalent all over India anyone who serves another, particularly in clearing the table after meals (and much more so if he removes or eats what is left over or left half consumed) is thereby considered to have lowered himself to that level, if not even to a lower level of respectability and social standing than that which the other[73] holds by birth.

[72] Groups which claim to be brahmins but are not widely recognized as such. In reading Śivai rather than Sinai, we follow Sauliere's suggestion, in his notes for his unpublished translation of the *Apology* where the same group is referred to. On the Komaṭṭis, see 1.3 and the note there.

[73] I.e., the one who had been eating.

Now the following is the opinion of the idolaters. They believe that when the priests sacrifice for deceased parents and others, the deceased parents and all the remote forbearers of the person for whom the sacrifice is offered approach the altar and partake of the cooked rice and of other eatables offered in sacrifice. The priest himself tidies up the floor like a common servant, takes away the remnants, and either casts them away, distributes them to other people, or eats them himself. Considering, therefore, that the public priests sacrifice not merely for themselves and for their own parents, but also for all the people in the temples, and considering too that the deceased parents, whatever their caste may be, are believed to eat of the sacrificial feast, the leftovers of which are removed by the priests and even consumed by them after they have cleaned up the floor — for such reasons the people's priests are looked down upon as very low and no better than members of a plebeian caste, including those of the meat vendors and of the parayas, reputed to be the lowest of the low. For the same reason it is enjoined that priests should be kept far away from any fellowship with brahmins, and that so very strictly that, if a brahmin chances to look upon them, he is ordered to look up to the sun and thus be purified. If he chances to touch their bodies, he is bound to have a purificatory bath, as we saw above. Both these forms of purification are prescribed by the *Parāsara Smṛti* for brahmins who may have either touched or looked upon people of low caste. The text runs as follows: *caṇḍāladarśane sadyaḥ ādityam avalokayet, caṇḍālasparśane caiva sa celam snānam ācaret.* I.e., "If (a brahmin) looks upon a paraya [man of the lowest social scale, as I have often pointed out], let him immediately look at the sun. If he happens to touch a paraya, let him be washed clean along with his clothes." This too is the reason alleged by the idolaters why neither brahmins nor rulers nor the noblest group among the merchants, when they sacrifice privately, ever allow themselves to sacrifice on behalf of others, but restrict their intention exclusively to their personal advantage. Should they do otherwise, they would be accounted to have fallen to the level of the caste of the man for whom they offered the sacrifice, as noted

above with reference to the text beginning with *dakṣiṇārtham tu.*[74] I.e., "The brahmin who performs sacrifice on behalf of a śūdra i.e., a plebeian, becomes a plebeian, and similarly with respect of other castes." Moreover, not only are the three higher orders forbidden to offer sacrifice for other men of orders different than their own, but they must refrain from sacrificing even for members of their own order, with the exception of their own parents and children, etc. The reason is that even within one's own clan, eating the leftovers of another's repast is considered to be very mean and unworthy of a freeborn man.

From this it follows that when a brahmin sacrifices at home for himself and for his parents, no one else may partake of that sacrificial banquet without incurring a stigma of ignominy. Much less is it allowed when it is a ruler, or a merchant, or some other, who is offering the sacrifice. The reason is that the deceased parents of the man who performs the sacrifice are believed to have partaken of that banquet first. However, it is perfectly correct to offer sacrifice for oneself and for one's own, because to eat the remnants of the repast of one's parents or children, etc., is by no means reputed sordid or degrading to a free man.

Who could possibly imagine then that the brahmins in India are the people's priests when, on the one hand, the brahmins of the Buddhist or atheist schools and those of the school of the wise refuse to admit so much as the very name "priest," since they tolerate no idolatry, and when, on the other hand, the brahmins of the idolaters' school, far from favoring the priestly function, consider it irreconcilable with their own, and do not allow the brahmins to offer sacrifice for anyone else, not even for the members of their own social rank or stock.

Nor does it matter that the brahmins of the idolaters' branch often offer the fire sacrifice at the king's expense and affirm that it will redound to the king's benefit. For, in so doing and speaking, the point is not that the fruit of the sacrifice accrues to the king nor

[74] See 5.1.3.

that it is performed for the king. Rather, the point is that while the alms donated towards the performance of the sacrifice contribute to the honor of Devendra and the other gods, as well as to the advantage of the officiant personally, the king himself gains the merit of a merciful act and a generous gesture. Nor again does it matter that one or another brahmin on occasion performs sacrifices for others, even performing for plebeians that other sacrifice which is called the oblation. For this is done due to unrestraint and greed for money, and is severely reproved and held up for censure by the true and wise brahmins. The laws make it liable to penalties, as shown above.

5.4. Consecrated Plebeian Priests

It remains for me to describe the second category of men who are destined to function officially as priests, namely those who become priests through election. They are selected from the plebeian stock, particularly from that of the veḷāḷas. Such are the paṇḍārams and others found chiefly in this kingdom of Madurai, but they can be found everywhere. Now the difference between these priests and those spoken of above lies in the fact that the first kind of priest commands greater publicity and officiates in the much frequented and very extensive temples. Those of the second category, by contrast, though they may be caretakers and managers of important temples, nevertheless do not sacrifice except before a portable image of the idol. They enjoy the privilege of distributing similar images to their disciples, and of empowering them to sacrifice to these privately at home. Now I need not prove that these plebeians actually discharge the office of priests, since in this realm of Madurai there is hardly anything done more commonly. As to their doing so officially and with the sanction of the state, this is substantiated by many texts from the *Āgamas*, and confirmed by universal temple usage and by grants allotted to them for this purpose from state revenues. Finally, that both these priests and the Śaivadvijas and Nambis are consecrated for this office of genuine priests by a peculiar rite and ceremony is no less a matter of common knowledge. Hence the *Hautripadam Āgamam*: *ācān potakāpikṣekattāl potittal nītiyākum otiya vacanaṁ tappi upatecam ceyvān ākil pātaka narakil viḻntu pataippatu tiṇṇam ākum.* I.e., "A

priest officiates rightly if he has received priestly ordination from another by the prescribed ceremony. But should he discharge the function of priesthood and the teaching attached to it without this initiation rite, he will fall into a hell proper to his offenses and there become its prey."

From all this it is clearly seen how groundless is the verdict of that man who proclaimed that the brahmins alone represent the priestly caste in India and that the paṇḍārams and other plebeians offer sacrifice only casually and by chance, just as among us Baptism can on occasion be administered by anyone, though normally and officially it is conferred by the priest alone. This is an unwarranted assertion. For the one thing, true brahmins are not authorised to discharge this office, but actually shrink from it with the greatest dislike. For another thing, the Indian people's priests, in the most proper and specific sense and as officially consecrated for that work through a definite rite, are the Śaivadvijas, the Nambis, the Sādhus, plus the paṇḍārams and others of that type, as we have seen above.

But suppose brahmins and only brahmins were selected and initiated into the priestly office. Could anyone conclude from this that the brahmin caste or stock is a priestly caste? I believe that I have sufficiently explained above that the specific function of this caste is the teaching of wisdom, and that for this very reason it ranks in nobility above all the other orders. What harm, then, could ensue in case the Indians had decreed by law that all official priests should be taken from the order of the learned, and specifically from the order of the brahmins, the noblest of them all? Would it follow from this that the brahmins could rightly be called priestly and sacred men, even before the actual conferring of the priesthood through the stated religious ceremonial? Was there not among the Athenians an established law, imposed by Solon, to the effect that the priests should be selected exclusively from the order of patricians? Did not the Romans pass a similar law, already enforced from the time of Romulus himself, as Dionysius certifies in *Antiquities of Rome*, volume 2.? Moreover, Romulus would have it that the first task of the king should be to attend carefully to

things religious and to conduct personally the sacrifices and other religious functions intended to placate the gods. Did anyone, on that score, ever declaim that the patricians of Athens as a whole or that the conscript fathers of Rome were priests or men dedicated to the gods? Did anyone ever pronounce superstitious the wearing of the golden bulla, the toga bordered with purple, or the tunic with the broad stripe, which were the distinguishing marks of the patricians and senators? That, however, should strictly have been the conclusion if that critic of mine were right in concluding that in the case under discussion the thread, the distinctive mark of the brahmins, should be counted as a superstitious badge. But, as I have pointed out, even such analogies would hardly affect our case, since the usage here in India is quite different. The priests of our Indian people are not selected from the brahmin order, as shown above.

Chapter Six

Description of Certain Usages Concerning the Brahmin Caste

Though it should be clear from what has been said that the brahmin caste is not a priestly caste but simply a class of learned men, still it will serve our purpose to throw light on certain customs which, I hear, have induced that honorable gentleman mentioned above to set the brahmins down as India's priestly caste.

6.1. Description of the First Custom

The first custom is that brahmins who are guilty of some grave offense are not to be put to death, but should either have their eyes gouged out or be sent into exile. On this basis the gentleman deemed himself justified in concluding that the brahmin caste is made up of priests. In truth, though, it is indeed a very risky affair to judge by what is fitting, or to draw conclusions based on natural inclinations, when judging matters pertaining to racial customs freely accepted and goals set in relation to them. Mistakes are often made, and the mistakes are all the more grievous and harmful when the decision on the point at issue pertains not to some niceties of understanding, as happens when discussing speculative problems, but rather to such concerns as a man's life or the salvation of his soul.

Now then, regarding the point under discussion, the first thing to be made known is that the brahmins' alleged immunity from the death penalty is absolutely false, since on many counts they can be put to death, as is decreed in Smṛti. Thus, if brahmins are guilty of the offenses which they label *ātatāyi*, they are to be executed forthwith. This is stipulated in the *Laws of Manu* (8.350) in the following words, *guruṁvā bālavṛddhau vā brāhmaṇaṁ vā bahu śrutam ātatāyinam nāmāntaṁ hanyād evāvicārayan* (8.350). I.e., "Whosoever they be, whether teacher, or child, or old man, or brahmin ever so learned, all such as are guilty of the offenses registered under *ātatāyi* are to be put to death without the usual legal formalities, and without any need for deliberation." The list of offenses coming under the title *ātatāyi* is recorded in the book

entitled the *Skaṇḍa Prahāsa* in the verse beginning with the words, *śāstra jīvi*: men charged with grave ingratitude, men who desert their parents in their old age, brahmins who do military service, etc. So too, brahmins caught drinking *suram* (i.e., an Indian spirituous wine distilled from the juice of the fruit of the palm tree or from some other Indian fruits) are ordered to be killed by having boiling hot *suram* poured down their throats. Thus we read in the *Śaṭatapam Smṛti*, in the passage beginning *brāhmaṇas tu*, etc.: if a brahmin has robbed a large sum of money that is due the king, he should undergo the punishment decreed by law, i.e., he should be beaten to death with clubs. Besides brahmins are justly executed for the crime of high treason, and for various other offenses which need not be listed in detail.

I do not deny, however, that the brahmin caste enjoys a measure of favor, privileged consideration in the matter of penalties. For crimes generally entailing the death sentence, they are usually visited with exile or blinding of the eyes; these mitigations are provided for them in the civil laws of Smṛti. But to say that this privilege accorded to brahmins is due to their being priests can be traced nowhere. Rather, ample evidence is found to show that their dignity and the honor paid them repose entirely on their reputation for learning and on their status of the highest nobility among their fellow citizens. For the same reason, it is enjoined on kings to hold brahmins in the highest esteem, as was shown in Chapter Two. It is surely a primary mark of special consideration due to brahmins that even in the meting out of punishments for crimes they are treated with greater mildness. This then is the privileged position allotted to wisdom and social preeminence. The brahmins, in drawing up the stipulations of the Indian civil law, have provided for their own advantage and dignity, and so too in many other directives as well — just as did the Romans of old by passing the Portia Law in virtue of which Roman citizens were exempted from the penalties of scourging and death, and instead were liable only to the penalty of exile or banishment.

6.2 Description of the Second Custom

A second custom involving the brahmins is that it seems to be their prerogative to instruct people in things related to the gods, a practice from which one may naturally conclude that they are also in some way spiritual fathers and priests as well. My answer is that in India we have two classes of men employed in instructing people in religious affairs.

6.2.1. The first class is made up of learned men and philosophers, and these are undoubtedly brahmins engaged as teachers not only in the public academies, but also at the palaces of princes. For it is their normal occupation to hold forth and discuss just about any and every subject, divine, religious, philosophical, moral, including astrology and poetry and all the other branches of learning, as I have explained previously. So it is not surprising to find brahmins employed in instructing people also in matters connected with worship and the gods. They are also recognized and generally denominated as the teachers of the Indian people. Nor is it any more surprising that both kings and royal notables habitually engage brahmins to lecture them at home on philosophical problems and on any subject of general knowledge. Likewise, they engage brahmins well-versed in the observances of that sect regarding matters concerning the particular sect to which they severally adhere, so that the brahmins can teach them the tenets and practices of their own sect. Such private tutors they name, by metonymy, "teachers," *guru* in Sanskrit. Their specific task consists in tutoring kings in all the duties of their particular sects. Now, on this score if someone should style brahmins as priests, I fail to see why he should not likewise describe as priests all philosophers and all theologians, no matter whether they teach in public schools or private houses. I fail to see why he should not include under the same denomination those reputed sages of antiquity who lectured not only publicly in academies and colleges, but also tutored privately a number of kings in wisdom and moral conduct and above all in piety and religion. Thus did Socrates for his pupil Alcibiades, Seneca for Nero, Plato for Dionysius, Aristotle for Alexander, and so on and so forth. Yet we commonly call them sages, never priests. Indeed, if the brahmins were only

learned teachers of some false religion, the connotation that they were priests might present some semblance of probability; but their teaching covers so many different branches of learning and extends so far afield that I absolutely fail to see how any doubt can persist in the matter under review.

6.2.2. The second class of teachers in religious matters consists of men who cater professionally and in a practical manner (so to say) to particular communities or families or households. These take an active part in conducting religious functions and idolatrous ceremonies. Their role is to offer sacrifice for those under their care, both during their clients' lifetimes and after their death, considering those persons especially entrusted to their spiritual ministry. Nevertheless, if a brahmin, led astray by greed of money, does this, or consents to offer up for others any of the sacrifices permissible only to the three higher orders (as indeed some do under both heads, particularly the brahmins called *purohitas*, who live in the king's courts and offer sacrifices on his behalf), this behavior is censured as a gross abuse, born of unbridled covetousness and most indecent for a brahmin, as I have indicated above. In fact, such caretakers of souls, similar to parish priests,[75] are requisitioned mostly from among the groups of Nambis, the Śaivadvijas mentioned previously, or the śūdra paÑḍārams. These men exercise great power in this important kingdom of Madurai. They are in charge of the sacred celebrations of practically all the influential families and may well be dubbed their spiritual fathers.

6.3 Description of the Third Custom

6.3.1 The third custom consists in this, that these people entertain such unbounded veneration for brahmins that at times they even call them gods. To this my answer is that by the same token one might conclude that all the kings of India are priests, since kings too are called gods. Thus, for instance, Deva Pāṇḍya, i.e., the Divine Pāṇḍya, is the name borne by the legitimate king of the realm of Madurai who, driven away by the Badagans, at present resides in the capital city of the kingdom named Tenganga.

[75] Parochi (Latin).

So too, Deva Chola, i.e., the Divine Chola, is king of the Tanjore nation, and Deva Chera, i.e., the Divine Chera, is the king of the Toṇṭai Realm (which at present has been annexed by the *nāyaka* of Gingee and the king of Chandragiri). The same custom prevails in the kingdom of Malabar where all the kings answer to the name of *tambirāns*, i.e., gods. Likewise *Rājā*, the king of Chandragiri, is called Deva Mahārājā, i.e., God and great king.

There is nothing about this mode of speaking to be wondered at as something used in the heathen lands, since we find it current even in Sacred Scripture. Thus, for instance, we read, "God stood in the synagogue of the gods."[76] In this passage, according to the common interpretation the term "gods" is applied to men of the first rank, distinguished persons. Moreover, among these Indian people not only are kings called gods, but they are also deemed worthy to be worshipped in the manner of gods, as may be gathered from the following text found in the book of Kālidāsa:[77] *tam arcyam ārād abhivartamānam.* I.e., "He witnessed [king Delipa] being hailed on his return and worshipped with sacred rites."

Because the king is set over the earth, he is called *bhūpālaka*, i.e., savior of the earth, and also consort of the goddess Earth, one of the eight guardians of the world named Aṣṭamūrti, because he is seemingly destined by the gods to share their dominion with them to some extent, much in the same way that prompted our own poets to refer to Caesar as sharing the empire with Jupiter.

My conclusion, then, is the following. Just as the habit has developed in the minds of these Indian people to honor their kings with the title of god because the kings' mission is to protect and make prosper the peoples under their care, so too the custom of calling the brahmins gods is no doubt due to an excessive sense of veneration, because the brahmins are the votaries of wisdom, and

[76] Psalm 82.1: "God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment." (NRSV)

[77] Kālidāsa is one of the greatest of the Sanskrit poets of India.

(as they themselves boast) teachers of the world. Indeed, it is a settled habit of these people to use such superlative language whenever they wish to extol their great men to the highest degree, even to the extent of comparing them to gods. Therefore in the *Yajur*, in the Upaniṣad of the Āraṇya section,[78] it is stipulated that everyone, to whatever order he may belong, should honor his father and mother as gods. Here are the words: *matṛ devo bhava, pitṛ devo bhava.* I.e., "Let your mother be a god to you; let your father be a god to you." So it became customary in addressing one's parents to use the same term that the law uses, namely *pitṛdevarkaḷ*, i.e., "divine parents." From this also stems the abusive practice adopted by sons, of kneeling at their mothers feet and worshipping them, overwhelming them with flowers and coins — as is generally done for gods. Again, in the same passage, by way of recommending guests and pilgrims to their hosts, the law bids them to be regarded as gods in these words, *atithi devo bhava*, i.e., "Let a guest be like a god to you." In speaking on the same subject, the *Laws of Manu* goes further. In explaining the law, at the verse which begins with *gurur agniḥ*, the author substitutes the words *sarvasya guruḥ* for the word "god," i.e., he is "the one who surpasses all things." Finally, they bid the wife to honor her husband in a like manner, as is clear from the text of *Padma Purāṇa*, beginning with the words *kātaraḥ kitavo.* So too in *Bhārata Purāṇam* and elsewhere, repeatedly.

Now in the case of the learned and of teachers of learning, the law is no less explicit, nor is public opinion less exacting or emphatic. Hence in holding these up to veneration, they use similar words, namely indicating that they should be regarded as gods. In prescribing this high honor in favor of the brahmins in the above mentioned Upaniṣad, the text of the law does not use the word "brahmin," but the word *ācārya*, meaning "teacher." Thus *ācārya devo bhava*, i.e., "Let a teacher [learned man] be like a god to you." Note too the *Laws of Manu*, commenting as it were on this mode of speaking, uses the word "supreme" in the verse quoted a little above, *gurur agniś ca jātināṁ, varṇānāṁ brāhmaṇo guruḥ*,

[78] The Upaniṣad in question is the first section of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad.*

patir eva guru striṇāṁ, sarvasyābhyāgato guruḥ. I.e., "Of all beautiful forms, fire is supreme; of the whole human race, the brahmin is supreme; the husband is superior to his wife; of all things, the guest is supreme." This text is introduced by the author to emphasize the honor to be shown to brahmins because of their outstanding learning, honor beyond that of other orders of citizens including kings. It comes after the author has defined the brahmin as a man of learning in the verse *tapo damo*, etc., adduced in Chapter Two above.

Moreover, in a verse in the same context, beginning with *uttamāṅgodbhavāt* (*Manu* 1.93) which I shall explain presently, the brahmins are deservedly said to be of all castes the *prābhu*, since they are the champions and propagandists of that wisdom which proceeds from the head of God. Concerning this, the commentary remarks that the term *prābhu*, which sometimes means "God," and sometimes "lord" or "superior," is attributed by the statute to brahmins, no doubt with exaggeration, but also by way of preference. Therefore, the honor due to father and mother is an honor which, as has been said in other references, they want to assimilate to that of the gods, and it is due not less but rather a fortiori to brahmins. The reason is that the brahmin is both the father and mother of all the people, in the sense (as the author has it) that the brahmin gives birth to man with respect to wisdom.

In truth, *Manu* explicitly maintains that the brahmin is to be regarded as father and mother to men: *mātāsau sarvabhūtānāṁ varṇajyeṣṭhaḥ pitāḥ guruḥ*. I.e., "That one [i.e., the brahmin] is the apex of all races, father, mother, teacher to all mortals." The following verse sets forth that he has priority over the natural father and mother, precisely because of his wisdom: *utpādaka brahmadātroḥ gāriyām brahmadaḥ pitā, brahma janmahi viprasya pretyacchaca śāsvatam.* (*Manu* 2.146). I.e., "By the two fathers, namely, one according to nature and the other according to the manner of wisdom which proceeds from the brahmin, we obtain the incorruptible good of this life." In this connection we should note in passing the word *śāsvatam*, which means "incorruptible" good and beatitude. It looks as though the author intended at the same time to state that the beatitude of the present life reposes in wisdom. Above we have cited a similar saying from the same author, and the same is included in the *Cintāmaṇi* under the question concerning the ultimate good of the present life.

It is clear, therefore, that from this appellation "god" no conclusive argument can be derived in support of the alleged brahmin priesthood. The appellation is nothing more than an exaggerated expression of the honor which these people consider attributable to wisdom. Indeed, it is no novelty that in heathen nations divine honors are paid to sages, greater even than those paid to kings. We read regarding Plato whom all acclaimed as divine, a sort of God, while others acclaimed him a demigod; after his death, the Magi sacrificed to him as is customarily done to the gods. What about Trismagistus?[79] Was he not called the grandson of Mercury due to his outstanding wisdom? As for Pythagoras, who taught philosophy in that part of Italy which was called Greater Greece, is it not a universally known fact that he was honored like a god? What wonder is there, then, that the name "god" should have been attributed to India's brahmins who, as I mentioned previously,[80] had contributed not a few documentary materials on philosophy to our Pythagoras?

6.3.2. But someone will further argue that according to the proponents of *māyā* brahmins are sprung from God's face or from God's head, and that, on this score, they are considered among Indians as holy men and priests. My answer is this: if the argument had any value, we would have to conclude, consistently with the tenets of the same sect of the proponents of *māyā* that all royal personages are gods, that all merchants of the higher group are gods, and that all plebeians are gods, or that they are all holy men and priests. For just as the brahmins are said to have sprung from God's head, so are the royal families reputed to have sprung from the shoulder, the merchants from the thigh, and the plebeians from

[79] The inventor of writing in Greek mythology, later connected with a belief in secret wisdom.

[80] Section 2.1.

the feet of God, all in the same manner. Are we then to say that all these men are gods, or priests? When, therefore, these people affirm that all brahmins and the other castes too have come from various parts of God, as it were, they attach quite a different meaning to their statement. I.e., they mean to establish a distribution of specific functions such as I have explained in Chapter One. By means of an apt emblematic narrative (indeed, the people here are constantly making use of such allegorical stories), they intended (indeed, using a shrewd literary device) to explain the different kinds of occupations devolving severally on the four social orders which I have distinguished and set forth in Chapter One. So they narrated that God produced the brahmins from his face or his head which is the seat of wisdom, the kings from his shoulder which is the sinewy center of strength, the merchants from his thigh which is the symbol of fecundity, and the plebeians from his feet which placed beneath the other parts as a base supports the whole body. That this is the true meaning of that statement is clear from the *Laws of Manu*. In the first place, Manu himself had recourse to that allegorical form of speech when he proceeded to set forth the various categories of creation: *lokānāṁ tu vivṛddhyarthaṁ mukha bāhūru pādataḥ, brāhmaṇaṁ kṣatriyaṁ vaiśyaṁ śūdraṁca nirvartayat* (*Manu* 1.31). I.e., "Contemplating the beauty of the world, God created respectively from his face, his shoulder, his thigh, and his feet, the brahmins, the kings, the merchants, and the plebeians." A commentator points out that the "world" here is to be understood in the sense of "the aggregate of men." In another verse *Manu* explains more definitely what he means by saying that the origin of the various castes is derived from the face, the shoulder, etc., for the sake of the beauty of the world. He notes, in fact, that a fine, well-ordered set-up of the world suggests that in relation to the offices which they severally discharge, some castes should represent the head, some the shoulders, some the thigh, and some the feet of this quasi-body. The words are as follows: *sarvasyāsya tu sargasya guptyarthaṁ sa mahā dyutiḥ, mukhaṁ bāhūru pajjānāṁ pṛthak karmānyakalpayat*, (*Manu* 1.87). I.e., "With a view to providing for the collectivity which he created, (God) attributed diverse occupations to diverse castes so that some should be like the head, some the shoulders,

some the thigh, some the feet." But listen to the commentator who confirms this beautifully. In this verse, the commentator says, Manu wished to explain in the first place, *varṇa dharma niyamo 'pi prapaṁcam*, i.e., the offices devolving on the various castes. Next, he states what he understands by the word "collectivity:" *prapaṁcam*, that is, "the conglomeration of men." Finally, he adds that by the symbol of the head, the shoulder, etc., he intends to signify the excellence or lowliness of these offices and castes. The words of this explanatory comment are the following: *mukhaṁ bāhūru pajjānāṁ brāhmaṇadināṁ mukhādyaṇgāj jātatvopanyāsaḥ varṇānām utkarṣāpakarṣa pradarśaṇārthaḥ*. I.e., "The reason why Manu links the brahmins, the kings, the merchants, and the plebeians to the head, the shoulders, the thigh, and the feet — on the understanding that the head is constituted by the brahmins, etc., is the following. He wishes to show to all, as a luminous truth, the difference in nobility or in lowliness among the castes, based on the difference of office." Further, that the head is the symbol of wisdom, and that the brahmin represents the head among men because he discharges the office of the wise man, the same *Manu* explains with these words: *uttamāṇgodbhavāt jyaiṣṭhyāt brāhmaṇaś caiava dhāraṇāt sarvasyaivasya sargasya dharmato brāhmaṇo prabhuḥ* (*Manu* 1.93). I.e., "'To be the head' and 'to spring from the head' (both interpretations are borne out by those words in *uttamāṇgodbhavāt*) are expressions which mark an eminent suitability for sciences, and which justify the title the brahmins possess, since by both right and merit they are the topmost among creatures." He repeats the same in the verse which runs as follows: *vaiśeṣyāt prakṛtiśraiṣṭhyat niyamansya ca dhāraṇāt saṁskārasya viśeṣasca varṇānāṁ brāhmaṇaḥ prabhuḥ* (*Manu* 10.3). I.e., "By the very fact that the brahmin upholds wisdom, which represents the foremost activity (i.e., like a head) and which denotes an eminent ability at shedding light [on truth], he establishes priority among the castes." These texts substantiate two facts: the first, as we have stated above, is that the brahmins are of all men the noblest. The second is that this nobility is based not on some sort of priestly function, but on the hereditary office of instructing people in wisdom, an office which is allegorically expressed by their springing from the head, or representing the head.

6.3.3. But you may object that although *Manu* explains in his own way the saying that the brahmins are sprung from God's face, nevertheless the proponents of *māyā* themselves may possibly interpret it differently. Besides, one of those people may well understand differently this allegory about the brahmins springing from the head, the kings from the shoulder, the merchants from the thigh, the plebeians from the feet. He may (I suggest) understand it literally, i.e., in the obvious sense that the words express. Indeed, innumerable mythical tales were current among the heathen in our own country in ancient times, and were commonly accepted with superstitious credulity, despite the fact that many philosophers interpreted them in a moral sense.

I answer, first, that it matters little to me what the people may say about this matter. Just because the sect of the proponents of *māyā* attributes a superstitious origin to India's races does not mean that everyone of them is to be put beyond the pale of salvation. What matters to me is that I should communicate the true idea of whatever concerns this subject matter. In the second place, I answer that this allegory, which is the point at issue here, is not to be taken in the same manner as those mythical tales which my objector adduces as an argument. The meaning of this allegory under discussion is well-known and is clearly set forth not only in the civic law books of *Smṛti*, as we have just now seen, but also by the proponents of *māyā* themselves in their own lawbook, in first Āraṇya of the *Yajur*, where the formula set down by their law agrees exactly with that of the *Laws of Manu*. In fact, it says that the world (i.e., the collectivity of mortal men) was created by God in such a way that the head of the world should be constituted by the brahmins, the shoulder by the kings, the thigh by the merchants, etc., as above. Indeed, after propounding certain rather obscure notions about God, the author starts on an account of the creation of men: *tasmāt virāḍ ājāyata, virājo adhipuruṣaḥ*, i.e., "From him (i.e., from god) came forth *virāj*, and this *virāj* is the true *puruṣa* [a term that means man]." He adds that by the word "man" he understands the entire multitude or assembly of men, as follows: *puruṣa eva idaṁ sarvaṁ yat bhūtam yac ca bhavyam*. I.e., "The word *puruṣa* stands definitely for the universal class of men,

namely for all those who existed in the past and all those who will exist in the future." Finally, he asks, what constitutes the head and what constitutes the other parts of this universal assembly: *mukhaṁ kim asya kau bāhū kāv ūrū pādāv ucyate*, i.e., "What in this *puruṣa* or universal assembly of men constitutes the face? which among them is the shoulder? which the thigh? which the feet?" He answers: *brāhmaṇosya mukham āsit bāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ ūrū tad asya yad vaiśyaḥ padbhyām śūdro jayata*. I.e., "The brahmin is his face, the king is his shoulder, the merchant is his thigh, the plebeians, last of all, are his feet."[81]

From this it is clear that this allegory, far from purporting to assign to the human race so much as a semblance of divine origin, merely serves to explain the distinction with respect to dignity and office which they severally hold regarding the orderly formation of this quasi-body of humanity. As a matter of fact, when in the same sections that same legal document proceeds to give an account of the real and physical generation of men, the trend is quite different. For then it narrates that two human begins, male and female, were created in the beginning, and that from this initial couple the human race was propagated and spread everywhere: *athādhiprajaṁ mātā pūrvarūpaṁ, pitottararūpam, prajā samdhiḥ, prajananaṁ saṁdhānam ityādi prajam*.[82] I.e., "At present I shall indicate the generation of men. There were two of them, male and female, and these were the father and mother of men; from these two their propagation spread all over the globe. The desire to procreate prevailed everywhere. Such is the origin of progeny, such is the Law."

6.3.4. But, you will continue to argue, saying, Still, you will meet people ignorant enough to have heard of nothing but that tale about the origin of the species from the members of God, and to know absolutely nothing about those explanations derived from the

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81 The oldest and famous of this text is that found in the *Ṛg Veda*, 10.90, an account of the generation of the natural, social, and religious world from the primordial person.

82 This passage too is from *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* 1.

lawbooks or about that passage you have adduced, in which it is expressly stated, with reference to the physical generation of men, that man originated from one single father and one single mother. I answer that this is a truism known, as people say, even to the half-blind and to barbers. Hence the common Tamil proverb: *lokapitā lokamātā irintitu*, i.e., "Two persons were the first parents, the father of the world and the mother of the world." Surely this saying and its obvious truth are far better known than that very mythical tale or allegorical narrative about the origins of men from the members of god.

6.4. Description of the Fourth Custom

The fourth custom is this, that the brahmins are habitual recipients of alms from these people. On this score a certain gentleman advanced the following plea: it cannot be maintained that the brahmins are supported by charity just because they are learned men. Therefore, it is because they are priests. Indeed, I am forced to repeat what I have said time and again, that it is risky to pronounce on the customs of the people here, unless a person has first diligently gone through their books and familiarized himself with these same customs and usages, guided by knowledge of their origin and source. For they differ so widely from our European usages that it is no wonder if those who base themselves on the culture of Europe pass judgment on the culture of India, they will err in this and similar conclusions.

6.4.0. This, then, is my point: brahmins receive alms on no other claim than this, namely, that they are poor and learned men. Both these qualifications are clearly stipulated in their civil law, which says that they are not entitled to receive alms unless they are both poor and learned. The first requirement, i.e., that brahmins can receive alms only if their poverty renders it necessary, is set forth in Smṛti in these terms: *pratigraha samarthopi prasaṇgaṁ tatra varjayet, pratigrahena hyasyāśu brāhmam tejo vinaśyati.* (*Manu* 4.186). I.e., "Though a brahmin's status be such as to justify his accepting alms, let him strictly refrain from making it a business matter to receive alms. If he has received alms, let him know that he has received it as the remuneration of a brahmin." A

truly poor brahmin's just claim to receive alms rests on his occupation, namely the teaching of wisdom, I shall show presently.

To the same purpose is that common quotation which is constantly on the lips of learned men as they move about: there is no merit whatever in almsgiving unless it is given to one in real need. Here are the words of that text: *yathā vṛṣṭis samudrasya, yathā tṛptasya bhojanam, tathā dhānapater dānam, triṇi dānaṁ vṛthā vṛthā.* I.e., "As rain falling into the sea is poured to no advantage, just as a meal served to one who is satiated is offered in vain, so is it with money that is donated to a rich man. These three things are all alike fruitless, all done in sheer waste." Elsewhere, the same rule is stated in a more general way: i.e., almsgiving is justified by poverty. In other words, one is entitled to receive alms because one is poor, as I shall show at the end of this discussion, which will also be the end of the chapter.

As to the second requirement, namely, that to be entitled to receive charity a brahmin must be a learned man or at least one engaged in acquiring learning, the rule is formulated here and there in the same lawbooks. Thus, for instance, there is this text of *Manu*: *atapāstava anadhīyānaḥ pratigraha rucir dvijaḥ, ambhas aśmaplave naiva sahate naiva majjati.* (4.190). I.e., "If any brahmin who is neither engaged in acquiring learning nor a wise man plans to collect alms, he plunges down into water together with the donor of the alms, like a man who sinks down with a stone tied around his neck." Here we must pause to note two words of the text, namely *atapaḥ* and *anadhīyānaḥ*. When the first word, *atapaḥ*, is applied to a brahmin, it generally means a man who does not learn, just as *tapaḥ* means a man who is learning and works hard at learning, as the commentator on *Manu* explains.[83] The second word, *anadhīyānaḥ*, means an ignorant man, just as *dhīyānaḥ* means a man who is already a man of learning, as the same commentator explains in expounding this text.

[83] Tapas and atapas are, respectively, ascetical practice and the lack thereof.

Moreover, lest anyone happen to entertain the idea that even a brahmin who is not engaged in the pursuit of literature is entitled to receive donations at least on a small scale, *Manu* adds the following warning: *tasmād avidvān bibhiyāt yasmāt tasmāt pratigrahāt, alpakenāpy avidvānhi paṇke gauriva sīdati* (4.191). I.e., "Let him who lacks learning refrain with utmost care from accepting anything. Should he accept so much as a trifle, let him be weighed down with afflictions, like a cow that has sunk down in filth and is held fast in it." Again, many texts caution against giving charity to any brahmin who is not educated, on the plea that such charity brings no merit, as the following text from the *Bratattam Purāṇa* makes clear: *tat dhanuṣpāni śāstrāni sarathas thena vājinā sarvam ekapade naṣṭaṁ dānam aśrotriye tathā.* I.e., "As once upon a time, when I fought against a single man without you [Viṣṇu], my bow, arrow, carriage, horse, all recoiled upon me helplessly, so will he who gives charity to an untutored brahmin lose the merit of it."

6.4.1. Now then, from what I have said so far, it is easy to understand the reasons which prompt people here in India to bestow on brahmins more generous alms than they do on other poor persons. The first reason is found in their status as men of learning; for in the estimation of Indians, of all those who are supported by charity, men of learning are deemed to be the most worthy, as is clear from the testimonies I have presented. Further, mixed with the appreciation of their worthiness there is a certain sense and manifestation of gratitude due to them as teachers of the community, as many passages of Smṛti bear out. Rules to the same purpose are also found in the Āraṇya section of the *Yajur* law book, Upaniṣad section, where after stating the nature and origin of knowledge, the author adds that those who impart knowledge must be supported by donations. The text runs as follows: *athādhi vidyām ācāryāḥ pūrvarūpam antevāsi uttara rūpam, vidyā samdhiḥ pravacanam sandhānam ityādi vidyām.*[84] I.e., "I proceed to show how knowledge is produced: there must be a teacher, a disciple to attend to the teacher's instruction, so that knowledge

[84] Again, *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* 1.

comes to exist and is communicated by oral teaching everywhere. This is what men call 'knowledge.'" Then, straightaway, he goes on to say that money must be provided for the teacher's sustenance, most heartily: *ācāryāya priyaṁ dhanam āhṛtya*, i.e., "Let him who offers money to the teacher do so from a motive of love."

6.4.2. The second reason for helping the brahmins with alms is that by the very fact of their being what they are, by their racial extraction and by their calling, they are to live poorly. The other hereditary classes have definite social occupations from which they can make a living, and so too the priestly class such as the Nambis and others mentioned previously, who derive a fixed income from the temple property. The brahmins alone, if they refrain from degeneracy, give themselves to the pursuit of learning in such an exclusive way that they do not engage in any other occupations, whether it be trade or governmental administration or anything else, as I have pointed out before. If there are some among them who are now in possession of fixed landed properties, they hold them as charitable donations made to them once upon a time by princely rulers who, with this intent, set apart an extent of land parceled out into portions, and assigned a portion to each one. Hence the brahmins themselves designate the plots of land they possess as *agrahāras*, i.e., as gifts made formerly by royal grants. But any brahmin worthy of the name, though owning such land, will never cultivate it himself — if, I say, they profess to be true to their calling.

Let it not be said that there are even now many brahmins who covet riches and by various artifices strive to secure great wealth and high positions in the state. For this, as I have said, is done from a motive of unbridled greed and despicable avarice, a depravity for which the Smṛti civil law decrees the penalty of degradation. To be rich is considered indecent for a brahmin, as is stated even in the *Yajur* law book: *na vai brāhmaṇe śrī ramata iti, na vai brāhmaṇe rāṣṭraṁ ramata iti*, i.e., "It is not pleasing for a brahmin to have riches, and to rule is unpleasing to the brahmin's calling." It should be noted that the word *ramate* in the text, if taken strictly, means to be glad, to look pleasing; it is used to denote that a thing is in its

right place. Thus we read in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *nānāvidhāgni bhū ramata iti*, i.e., "The earth rejoices, and as it were rests content, for as it finds itself pleased under the rule of various kings." On the contrary, the word *na ramata* denotes a feeling of sadness in a thing that finds itself in a wrong and unsuitable place or subject. Hence *na ramata* used in our text conveys that very meaning, i.e., the incompatibility that exists between brahmins and riches, as much as to say that riches in some way feel uncomfortable and sad when possessed by brahmins. Therefore *tapaḥ*, one of the commendable qualities which ought to be found in the brahmin, is interpreted by many to mean living frugally and on very little, content with just food and clothing.

6.4.3. A third reason underlying this custom of almsgiving is drawn from a false principle to which many Indians, namely all those who follow the sect of the idolaters, rashly adhere. They hold in fact that the higher the dignity of lineage and social standing of the person who receives alms, the greater also the merit that accrues to the donor of the alms. Hence they contend that charity done to a plebeian produces very little meritorious fruit; charity done to the higher class of merchants bears more fruit. In the case of the royal families, still more, while the maximum yield results from charity given to brahmins, especially if the brahmin is a votary of wisdom; otherwise, in respect to the brahmin too the fruit of merit is less. Hence the *Laws of Manu* (7,85) has the following: *samam abrāhmaṇe dānaṁ dviguṇaṁ brāhmaṇe bṛve*[85]. I.e., "If you give an alms to person who is not a brahmin, the reward is equivalent to the deed; if you give charity to a brahmin who teaches the sciences, you will receive double the reward."

It is indeed a widespread belief among Indians that the merit of almsgiving increases proportionately to the caste of the poor man and that, consequently, it is highest when the alms is bestowed on one from the noblest caste, namely that of the brahmin. This view finds expression in a text taken from the *Skaṇḍa Purāṇam*: *brāhmaṇe koṭi guṇitaṁ kṣatriye tu tad ardhakam vaiśye tu ardhārdhakaṁ caiva tu, śūdre caivatu niṣphalam*. I.e., "If you do so in favor of a member of the royal family, you will receive half the amount; if to a distinguished merchant, again half the above amount, i.e., half the king's; if you give charity to a plebeian, you receive no reward at all." Now when I stated above that in the matter of almsgiving the brahmins are helped more liberally than other persons equally poor or poorer still, I said so because public charity is extended to the poor of other classes as well as to the poor among the plebeians.

[85] Reading uncertain.

Now if, in the text just quoted, it says that charity given to plebeian carries no merit at all, the saying thus interpreted implies some sort of rhetorical exaggeration to show how little merit mercy extended to a plebeian brings with it, and how much, on the contrary, the fact of the social dignity attached to lineage contributes to enhancing merit. Otherwise, they do not deny that charity shown even to a plebeian has its meritorious effect, although to a lesser degree. By way of confirmation, they adduce the well-known story of a renunciant named Śomata who, they say, for a whole year fed at his own home a poor paraya, (i.e., a man of the social class reputed to be at the very bottom of the social scale), and who on that score Śomata received after his death a singular reward. Moreover, common usage subscribes to the same opinion, since the general practice here is to distribute alms not to members of the nobler orders alone, but also to that of the plebeians, not only from private but also from public funds, and not only to those of the plebeian order who are priests, of whom mention was made above (i.e., paṇḍārams, sādhus, and the like), but also to others as well. This can be seen all around this very town of Madurai, particularly at the most celebrated temples, i.e., those of Śokanātha and Aḻakar.[86]

6.4.4. Finally, poverty, in the most comprehensive sense, is considered to be a sufficient object for charity, wherever poverty is to be found. On that score, these people hold the view that while in

[86] Śokanātha is Śiva, and his consort is Mīnākṣī, Goddess of the great Madurai temple; Aḻakar is Viṣṇu. The festival of the wedding of Śiva and Mīnākṣī, which Aḻakar attends, is celebrated even today.

this matter of charity priority may be given to one man over another on the basis of lineage in view of a higher degree of merit, nevertheless the lower classes may not be altogether neglected. Indeed, destitute persons — who comprise all the poor, not excepting *parayas*, nay more, not excepting anyone whomsoever, be if he is the greatest sinner, provided he begs for food to sustain his life — are included under the appellation *atithi*, "guest." We already know how highly the laws speak of guests, even to the extent of ordering them to be regarded and welcomed as gods, as has been shown earlier in this very chapter. Such is the ruling formulated in the following text: *mūrkho vā yadi cāṇḍalo brāhmaghnaḥ putra ghātakaḥ samprapto vaiśvadevānte sotithiḥ paramaḥ smṛtaḥ*. I.e., "Anyone who presents himself at meal time, be he a great sinner, be he a *paraya* by origin, be he a murderer of a brahmin, a slayer of children, that man must be to you in very truth an *atithi*," i.e., as a pilgrim and a man in want whom the law bids you honor as a god. This was explained above under the heading "the third custom."[87]

[87] At 6.3.1.

Chapter Seven

Concerning the Thread, the Distinctive Mark of the Brahmins

7.0. Eight Arguments, the Result of Further Study, Prove that the Thread is Purely Social

From all that has been said thus far in this treatise it should be sufficiently clear that the wearing of the thread, the distinctive badge of the brahmin class, has absolutely nothing superstitious about it, but constitutes nothing more than a social practice. The "thread," as it is called, consists of a thin thread of twisted yarns knotted at the middle and worn from the left shoulder across to the right side like a garland. I must admit that concerning this practice of wearing the thread I had some misgivings some three years back. Somewhat awed by the belief many Christians entertained about it, I had somewhat hesitatingly come to think and to believe, on the strength of a particular practice common among not a few brahmins (about which more further on), that one might possibly discover inherent in it some sort of superstition, were it only by accident and by reason of some secondary connotation. But, as I confessed at the beginning of this book, I was altogether mistaken. During the last three years I have carefully checked not only the plentiful testimonies of the books but, what is more to the purpose, the actual usage and practice common to the brahmins. I have come to understand with the most penetrating insight that the wearing of that thread garland is, absolutely and without the least verbal qualification, altogether free from all religious import, and must be regarded as mere social custom. From what I have presented thus far in this fact-finding report, everyone will be able by himself to draw up a number of clear and convincing reasons so as to prove this point.

7.1. The Thread Signifies that the Brahmins are Wise Men

The first reason, then, may be presented in argumentative form as follows. The brahmin thread is nothing but a badge worn by brahmins as a sign of their rank and office, by which they are distinguished from other men who are not brahmins. Now the rank and office of the brahmins have nothing superstitious about them,

nor are they intended for any superstitious priestly function nor for any other superstitious undertaking. They merely represent the status of men of learning, teachers in any and all branches of knowledge. Therefore the brahmin thread has nothing superstitious about it, but is merely a badge worn by brahmins as a sign of their rank and, in particular, of their specific office which consists in imparting knowledge. The conclusion of this syllogism is valid. The minor is evident from all that has been said thus far.

7.1.1. Proved by the Testimony of Western Writers

This statement is clearly supported by Strabo,[88] *Geographia*, Book XV, where he deals with India and Persia. Towards the middle of the book, in a passage which treats of philosophers, he remarks that Megasthenes[89] lists the Indian philosophers differently. According to him, there are two categories, one he denominates as brahmins, the other as *germani*,[90] but he gives priority to the brahmins because their opinions agree with those of the Greek philosophers. He says that they gather in an enclosed area which is situated in front of the town and suited for their pursuits. They live frugally, taking their meals seated on skins and hides. They abstain from flesh meat and sexual intercourse, fully intent on serious discussions. Nearcus[91] too mentions the brahmins when treating of the Sophists. He says that there are those among the brahmins who attach themselves to kings as their counselors, while others engage in contemplation and in considerations about the things of nature. Clitarus too speaks about brahmins, describing them as shrewd men with a partiality for controversy. He mentions that they go in for physiology and astronomy. Coelius of Rhodes, in *Readings from the Ancients*, Book 10, Chapter 31, records that there are philosophers in India, and that they are divided into two

88 Strabo (b. 64 BC) was the most illustrious geographer of the ancient Greek world.

89 Megasthenes (350-290 BCE) authored the *Indica*, one of the West's most influential sources of ideas and images about India in the ancient world.

90 Reference uncertain.

91 Nearcus (died in 312) was one of Alexander's generals; his account of India is included in Arrian's *Indica*.

schools, one the school of the brahmins, and the other the school of the *germani*. In his book he discourses copiously about their doctrines.

Hence I do not know on what authority or ground anyone may get it into his head to suppose that the brahmins constitute a class of superstitious priests. Even our own Western writers cry out against such a notion. Whoever holds a notion so glaringly false as to contend that brahmins are a priestly caste will more surely prove his own ignorance of history than prove brahmins to be in any way connected with a priestly office.

7.1.2. Proved by the Investiture Ceremony

To return to our argument. The major premise, I should think, is incontestable, for without exception everyone is perfectly aware that the brahmin thread is a most common sign and distinctive mark of the social grade and specific office of the brahmins. A manifest proof is drawn from the very formula used at the initiation ceremony when the thread which the brahmins wear is imposed for the first time. The formula is recorded in the book entitled the *Āpastamba Sūtra*. In fact, when the teacher lays the thread upon his pupil's shoulder, he uses the following words: *tvām upanayanakarmaṇā saṁskariṣye*. Word for word this means, "By conferring the thread I proclaim and assign thee. I note that both significations, to "declare" and to "assign," are included in the word *saṁskāryate*, which is specifically used when anyone is installed, officially proclaimed, and declared king or leader or magistrate, or invested with any similar rank.

7.1.3. Proved by the Brahmin Usage

Hence, according to brahmin usage a brahmin boy, so long as he is not invested with the thread, does not differ from those of other castes, except at best potentially, whereas by receiving the distinctive thread he is declared fit for, and so to say deputed to, the office of a man of learning. This accounts for the proverbial saying, *janmanā jāyate śūdraḥ, karmaṇā jāyate dvijaḥ*. I.e., "By birth he is born a plebeian; by the investiture of the thread he is born a brahmin."

7.1.4. Proved by the *Laws of Manu*

Hence, the Smṛti civil lawbook prescribes that before investiture with the thread no one may presume to engage in pursuits proper to the office of a man of learning. The reason is that before receiving the caste thread, a brahmin is not different from a plebeian. The passage in the *Laws of Manu* reads as follows, *nābhi vyāhārayed brahma svadhā ninayanādṛte śūdreṇa hi samas tāvat yāvad vedena jāyate* (2.172). I.e., "Let no one undertake the functions distinctly assigned to the wise man before he has been invested with the thread, since so long as he has not obtained his legitimate birthright, he is equal in rank to a plebeian." By "legitimate birthright" the author understands the distinctive sign of the wise man prescribed by law, i.e., the caste thread. We have a similar observation in the text about the dispensation which may be granted in favor of those deemed fit for investiture before the age of eight years, which is the normal age for it. The same Smṛti, in the same part of the book, reads as follows: *brahmavarcasā kāmasya kāryaṁ viprasya pañcame* (2.37). I.e., "If a brahmin boy attains the desire for the light of learning (earlier than usual), he is granted the investiture with the thread even at the age of five years."

We derive a double advantage from these and many additional testimonies found in the same book and almost on the same page, purporting to caution against starting a boy's education before he has been initiated by reception of the thread; this is for the very reason that, prior to that, he is not born as a brahmin. The first advantage is that we have clearly proved the validity of our major proposition, namely, that the brahmin thread is a distinctive mark of the office or function of the brahmin. The second advantage following from the said testimonies is that we have also directly proved the conclusion of our syllogism, namely, that the caste thread is the badge of office of a man of learning, of his right, i.e., his birthright, for the teaching of wisdom. Mark carefully that the words in the first text quoted above the author does not say, *nābhivyāhārayed brāhmaṇa svadhāni*, i.e., "Let him beware encroaching upon the office of a brahmin." Rather he says, *nābhivyāhārayed brahma svadhāni* (2.172), i.e., "Let him beware

entering upon the office of wisdom." *Brāhmaṇa* signifies "a brahmin" whereas *brahma* means "wisdom." Similarly in the second text, the author does not say, *brāhmaṇa varcasa kāmasya* (2.37), i.e., "On aspiring to the light of a brahmin," but *brahma varcasa kāmasya*, i.e., "One aspiring to the light of wisdom." The same interpretation holds for the other texts we find compiled on the same point.

Now then this is the first reason to prove that the brahmin thread is not some superstitious emblem, but instead simply a badge of that wisdom which it is the brahmin's business to teach. I see nothing amiss in my argument. Truly, if the evidence I have produced above is true and to the point, I for one do not see what more convincing proof can be presented concerning this matter.

7.1.5. Similarly the Threads Worn by the Kings and Merchants Signify their Office

Furthermore, if by the foregoing demonstration we reach a definite conclusion on the matter of the brahmin thread, we must in due proportion draw the same conclusion with regard to the thread worn by kings and that worn by merchants (though so far as these two classes are concerned, I am not aware of any misgivings being any longer entertained by any European). For just as a thread prepared from cotton yarn denotes the office of a brahmin, so does a thread made from wool symbolize the function of a king, and one made from hemp represent the occupational duties of a merchant. That these orders too have their distinctive caste thread is a well-known fact, since they habitually wear them. That theirs should be made of a different material can be proved from various texts. E.g., *Manu* says, *kārpāsam upavitam syāt viprasyordhvam vṛtaṁ trivṛt śaṇa sūtramayam rājño vaiśyasyā vika sautrikam* (2.44). I.e., "Let the thread of the brahmin be formed from thrice twisted cotton yarns, for kings let it be prepared from woolen threads, for merchants let it be from hemp." By assuming their respective threads both kings and the merchants are made known as such. Wearing their caste thread both marks them as fit for their peculiar profession and distinguishes them from those in other professions. All this is proven by the same testimonies adduced shortly before

with reference to brahmins. Indeed, the brahmins who are learned teachers of law apply all these texts proportionately to the other higher classes as well. Hence, kings and merchants, like the brahmins, are commonly addressed as *dvijaḥ*, i.e., twice-born men; for they are born first by natural birth and then by a fresh birth to a life in civil society, by entering openly upon the occupations proper to their grade in society by wearing their distinctive thread. Nor is there any difference in the formula used at the investiture ceremony when the thread is conferred for the first time. The words are the same as for the brahmins, namely, "I declare you (fit) and assign you to the employment signified by the thread." The specific employment implied in the formula is understood to be that of ruler for a king, and of trade for a merchant, just as for a brahmin, it is that of being a brahmin.

By the same token, neither may the members of these orders, i.e. kings or merchants, exercise any of the functions belonging to their proper order before they are invested with their distinctive thread, just as we have said with reference to the brahmins. Nor, moreover, are they considered different from plebeians prior to assuming the thread. Again, just as the *Laws of Manu* allows a brahmin boy who is deemed fit for learning and manifests an early craving for the honor of learning to be invested with the thread at the age of five years, so the same Smṛti immediately provides for the same concession to be granted, in due proportion, to a young prince who already manifests the dispositions of courage and military valor, allowing him to assume the thread in his sixth year of age, and to a merchant boy, in his eighth year. Normally, the brahmin thread is bestowed at age eight, that of royalty at age eleven, and that of the merchant class at age twelve. The Smṛti reads as follows: *brahma varcasa kāmasya kāryaṁ viprasya pañcame rājño bālārthinaḥ ṣaṣṭhe vaiśyasyehārthino 'ṣṭame* (*Manu.* 2.37). I.e., "To a brahmin who begins to appreciate the distinction of learning, the wearing of the thread is conceded in his fifth year; to a prince who begins to ambition the renown of valor, in his sixth year; to a merchant boy who already aspires to acquiring a large fortune, in his eighth year."

But enough of these observations concerning the various kinds of threads, jotted down in passing! There is no need to argue about them, since they are not in dispute. Furthermore, the arguments which I have adduced with reference to the brahmin thread and others I shall produce hold equally and moreso in the case of the other orders, as will be obvious to any thoughtful mind.

7.2. The Thread is Worn by Other Castes

We have a second and no less weighty reason to prove that the brahmin thread is simply a badge of learning in general which, as said before, represents the brahmin's traditional calling. It is taken from the practice adopted by members of the lower and even of the lowest castes, who boast proficiency in some skill or other — not excepting even purely mechanical skills or crafts, the principles and method of which are recorded in writing. For these men too are authorized to wear the thread formed from cotton threads customary among the brahmins. Those who so desire to wear it do so on the plea that such skills are part and parcel of general knowledge. If they are set down in writing in a methodical and scientific way and are cleverly taught, they may well be reckoned among the branches of learning and the disciplines, the more so as they had sundry brahmins, whose names they record, as their authors. For although the brahmins are not allowed to engage in any craft of the mechanical kind, they may nevertheless know all about them. Indeed, they do not consider it beneath their dignity to lecture on these subjects or to explain the guidelines and principles underlying the rules of each and every art, provided it is a genuine art. Now the arts and sciences that are classed under this category, as subjects which are taught in an orderly manner and under definite rules and therefore are of a sufficiently high order that entitles those who know and teach them to wear the thread of the learned — these arts and sciences are commonly listed as eighteen in number. In the book entitled the *Periya Bhāṣya*,[92] we have the following texts: *aṇgāni vedaś catvāro mimāṁsā nyāyavistaraḥ purāṇaṁ dharmaśāstraṁ ca vidyā hyetāścaturdaśa*; *āyur vedo dhanurvedo gandharvaścety anukramāt*; *arthaśāstraṁ param*

[92] Literally, the "Great Commentary;" it is not clear which text de Nobili means.

tattvam vidyā hyaṣṭādaśa smṛtāḥ . I.e., "Six *aṅgas* [i.e., six books dealing with the way of reading out the law texts in public]; the four law books;[93] Mīmāṁsā [which deals with the theological tenets of the idolaters' school described in Chapter Three, for here the author abounds in his own sense and in that of his sect, as the other theological sects describe their several theological doctrines under the title *Cintāmaṇi*]; the remaining science of disputation, natural philosophy, and logic; *purāṇa* [which deals with poetical and historical works], *dharmaśāstra* [which deals with moral philosophy under which they also include the civil laws of Smṛti], *āyurveda* [manuals of medicine], *dhanurveda* [treatises on the art of warfare of military science], *gandharva* [treatises dealing with music and dancing], and *arthaśāstra* [manuals treating of mechanical arts]. These are the eighteen branches of learning in the list.

As for the mechanical arts, they include every form of handicraft, provided each of them embodies certain principles and methods, whether written or taught by a teacher in an intelligent way, as is usually done. Under this heading they figure to themselves particularly the professionals or artisans, i.e., goldsmiths, silversmiths, braziers, blacksmiths and any other metal-workers, and also carpenters, stone-cutters, workers in brocade, and others in similar callings. Similarly, they associate with the military art swordsmanship, athletics, and wrestling. Now all these men of culture and of skilled labor are entitled to wear the thread of brahmins, and they do wear it, if they choose to. Except for the instructors in those arts and those who have developed a very high degree of perfection in their line, however, most do not wear it habitually. I do not deem it necessary to add any further proofs, as everybody has the opportunity to see this practiced before his eyes.

Under the heading *Purāṇa* they include not only history and poetry, but also the knowledge of languages. So we have for instance in this very city of Madurai a famous Institute called the

[93] I.e., the four Vedas.

Saṅgam, which in the time of the Pāṇḍyan kings counted forty-eight learned men. On its model a number of academies have been founded in India with the object of enhancing the splendor particularly of the Etruscan language.[94] These men make it their business to make a thorough study of Tamil, the language spoken in these parts, and also of Tamil poetry. The members of this Saṅgam were recruited from every social class, and well nigh all of them wore the thread on the grounds that they were regarded as eminent men, well-versed in the niceties of the spoken language, and competent in imparting their knowledge of the local culture. What is more remarkable still is that fact that Valluvār, a *paraya*, i.e., of very low extraction, was yet a singular ornament to the Saṅgam Institute and so was granted the distinctive badge of the thread, because of his scholarship and outstanding competence in the vernacular and in acknowledgment for that highly prized Tamil composition of his, *Tiruvaḷḷuvappayar*.[95]

We find also at the present time in the kingdom of Manamadurai (situated not far from this city of Madurai) a very famous clan called the *Kārya Makkaḷ* whose hereditary business, by a long line of descent, is to devote themselves to the improvement of Tamil, the language of the people, to such an extent that nothing is ever published in that field that has not been submitted to and approved by them. They too belong to the plebeian order, but they wear the thread of the brahmins, precisely in recognition of their learning and for no other reason. Then there is the case, still fresh in the memory of the present generation, of a man who was a Turk[96] by birth and religion, and who had become so proficient in the knowledge of the Tamil language in the eyes of those Tamil scholars that he was able to interpret its beauties and idiomatic gems, with exquisite elegance of diction, and on that account was honored with the prerogative of wearing the thread, a privilege still enjoyed by his sons. It is obvious, therefore, that the

[94] de Nobili is perhaps theorizing that Tamil is related to the ancient Etruscan language.

[95] The famous wisdom text better known as *Tirukkuraḷ*.

[96] I.e, a Muslim.

wearing of the brahmin thread is symbolic of the specific brahmin calling which consists in imparting learning in the most comprehensive sense, so that proficiency in any science is a sufficient title for wearing it.

7.3 The Thread is Worn by Buddhists

A third reason to prove that the brahmin thread is not tainted by superstition but is merely a badge of learning in any field whatsoever, is taken from the practice of the Buddhist brahmins, i.e., the class of unbelievers of whom we have spoken in Chapters Three and Four. For these men have been accustomed to wear that badge of the thread from time immemorial. They flourished in these parts very long before those laws and books of the idolaters were introduced. In fact, the Buddhists are coming in for very vehement attacks from the authors of those books, as has been shown in the references given above. Now these Buddhist brahmins have nothing in common with other brahmins, save that they too busy themselves with teaching philosophy and with other natural sciences. As for belief in the gods, worship and priesthood — they reject all of this; indeed, they are foremost in deriding all the idols which are worshipped in these parts. But a few ignorant neophytes once maintained that the brahmin thread is worn in their honor! Therefore, the wearing of the brahmin thread is both a very common badge and a symbol of the teaching profession, signifying the authority to teach any subject whatsoever.

7.4. The Thread is Worn by the Wise

A fourth reason to the same effect is supplied by the brahmins of the school of the wise, the "spirituals," of whom mention was made in the same chapters, three and four. For these too have been using this badge of the thread from time immemorial, and these are reputed to be the wisest and most honorable among the brahmins. But they do not agree on anything with the other brahmin schools, except on their common profession as teachers of the sciences. In fact, they acknowledge but one God, a truth unquestionably known by the light of reason, and they absolutely reject all those idols and those theological doctrines held by the idolaters. This makes me wonder whether the brahmin thread was previously a sign attesting

faith in those superstitious beliefs; they also reject every species of the priestly function introduced by the idol worshippers. In truth, far from admitting any such superstitious priesthood, they commonly teach that even the one true God should be worshipped in no other way than in spirit. So much, then, for this fourth reason.

7.5. The Thread is Worn by the Idolaters

A fifth reason is gathered from the brahmin idolaters themselves. Their various sects have been shown previously to differ among themselves most radically, indeed to be altogether opposed to one other. Not only that, but new sects are seen to spring up daily and these, in turn, are found to differ totally from the ancient ones. Now all these sects retain the sign of the thread. Therefore, the thread cannot logically be a superstitious sign, since one and the same sign must necessarily signify one and the same definite object. It stands to reason, therefore, that as a sign the thread stands for a badge which is indiscriminately retained by everyone, for the sole purpose of retaining the rank proper to each, i.e., the rank of a cultured and learned man.

7.6. Wearing the Thread is Not Linked to Worship of Brahmā

A sixth reason is drawn from the attitude of the chief sects of the devotees of Śiva, the devotees of Viṣṇu, and the other sects too, excepting the proponents of *māyā*. For as a result of prolonged investigation I see that the whole suspicion about the thread being tainted by superstition rests for some people on this supposition: i.e., by wearing the thread brahmins attest their belief in that supreme God they call Brahmā, because the proponents of *māyā* believe him to be the particular protector and defender of brahmins as the official exponents of wisdom, although they hold him to be the creator and father of all the races of men and of the whole world. Some, however, base their suspicion on the supposition that the brahmins apparently wear the thread as a sign of their being thoroughly acquainted with the four lawbooks of the proponents of *māyā*. But with the exception of the proponents of *māyā*, the overwhelming majority of the brahmin idolaters have taken to themselves some other deity and pay no homage whatever to Brahmā, as we have indicated in Chapters Three and Four.

Similarly, as for the laws of the proponents of *māyā*, they consider the religious rites to be full of lies, and therefore neither learn them nor consider them obligatory nor worth anything. Hence, they profess other laws of their own which they extol as true and worthy of observance by all brahmins, as I have pointed out in those chapters. The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that, by retaining the thread, they by no means intend it to be a sign attesting their adherence to the god Brahmā or to the four lawbooks.

7.7. Renunciants Wear the Thread

A seventh reason is based on the custom of the renunciants (*saṁnyāsis*). These are the men in India who renounce human affairs and lead a chaste life, whatever the religious denomination to which they may belong. Among them, there are very many who adhere to the idolaters' school and venerate the same false gods as their co-religionists (while many other renunciants belong to the school of the wise and are utterly averse to idol-worship). Yet all of them get rid of the thread and renounce sexual intercourse, even if they continue to worship their false gods with even greater devotion than before. Therefore, the wearing of the thread is not a sign attesting belief in those false gods nor a distinctive mark of a religious sect. For if it were, it would not be relinquished by men who, far from renouncing the worship of those gods, rather adhere to it all the more.

Furthermore, the brahmins maintain that the renunciants set aside their insignia on the ground that they serve to enhance a man's dignity and high distinction, such as are fittingly renounced by a penitent. Moreover, they consider that it ill becomes a renunciant even to remember his caste and his paternal home. This is confirmed by the fact that when they renounce the thread, renunciants still retain all the other insignia which have a religious character, for instance the sacred ashes, a symbol of Rudra, the *nāmam* in honor of Viṣṇu, the *śobhacandanam*[97] in memory of

[97] Reading *śobhacandanam* (splendid sandalpaste) to make sense of the obscure *chobhucandanam*.

Kṛṣṇa, etc. Why then do they not retain the thread, if it too is a symbol sacred to the gods?

7.8. Converts Continue to Wear the Thread, Without Criticism

My eighth argument is based on two actual experiences which my Christian community and the new converts who have joined it have gone through. This argument is particularly relevant, since even if the other reasons thus far adduced were considered weak — which they surely are not — this one would by itself, in my thinking, be sufficiently strong to remove every vestige of doubt concerning the nature of the thread.

7.8.1. Let us begin with the first experience. The brahmins converted to the faith and admitted into our church have each in a particular way suffered various kinds of persecution and insult, and continue to suffer daily at the hands of the brahmin idolaters whose sects they have abandoned. The reason why they are thus molested, as the heathen themselves explain, is precisely that they have rejected the ancestral, religious belief of their particular sect. As apostates from their forbearers' religion, they are forbidden access in particular at the time of the heathen religious functions. Should they draw near, they are received with shouts of "Away with you!" because they are debarred from the use of sacred ashes, the *nāmam*, the *śobhacandanam*, and every other symbol of their gods. Moreover, many of their fellow caste men believe that it is unlawful for them even to hold conversation with our converts or to eat with them. Much less do they allow them, on the occasion of a discussion regarding our own religious beliefs and practices, to use the testimonies of their books on matters of their sects.

To give an example: last year, when a heathen brahmin was in my presence having a discussion with one of our brahmin neophytes who holds the degree of doctor, the former looked contemptuously at him and shouted at him in angry tones, "How can you boast of knowing the law of the proponents of *māyā* since you regard it as false?" And yet, despite the resentment the heathens entertain against our brahmin converts, until now no one has ever asked them, "Why do you wear the brahmin thread?" Nor

have they forbidden them the use of it, which they surely would have done if the wearing of it had a superstitious significance like the other practices I have mentioned. It must be said, then, that the idolater brahmins adopt in their relation to our people who have broken away from them the very same attitude and policy that we follow regarding our excommunicated apostates. Just as we exclude such men from communion and participation in our sacred functions and keep them away from intercourse and community life with us, yet without denying them the common rights of citizens or the wearing of their family insignia, so do these heathen brahmins forbid our brahmin converts access to their sacred functions and familiar intercourse with them. But they care nothing about common social badges and ornaments, and do not interfere with them. Besides, they behave in exactly the same way regarding other heathen brahmins who have deserted them to cross over to some other heathen sect. For the devotees of Viṣṇu do not associate with the devotees of Śiva, be it in sacred or in domestic fellowship. The same is the case in other things. Much less are they inclined to keep up fellowship when one of their own sect proves to be a deserter and passes over to the Buddhist sect, the atheist sect, the sect of the proponents of the Real, or any other. While not interfering in the matter of the thread or in other usages common to the caste, they show themselves extremely strict and aloof on points that concern their own distinct sect.

7.8.2 I pass on to a second experience, so as to prove in the same way that our brahmin converts encounter no difficulty in retaining the use of their caste thread, whether here in this city of Madurai, or in any other town throughout India where they live among their heathen fellow caste men.

7.8.2.1. There is no difficulty in the city of Madurai. Regarding this particular city in which we live, we have found by experience, and we know for certain, that there is not a single person who thinks that the thread worn by our brahmins stands for a sign indicative of adherence to any false sect. Nor do our neophytes entertain any such notion, for they know themselves better than anybody else. They know that there is no one in their company

who wears his thread with any superstitious intention or with so much as the shadow of doubt that it might be superstitious. Neither do the heathen attach to it any superstitious import, since it is a notorious fact and common knowledge throughout the city that our brahmins, for one thing, wear their caste thread but, for another thing, are not worshippers of the gods but of the true God and of Christ. For all the heathens, when questioned about it, say so openly. There is hardly any princely personage around town at whose court a legal action against our brahmins has not been brought. The idolaters charge them not only with having abandoned their ancient faith and their particular sect but also, because they associate with me, with having lost caste. Yet never has there been a question about their wearing the brahmin thread, nor is there any challenge now.

Therefore, even supposing for argument's sake that some superstitious meaning was inherent in the practice of the brahmin thread (while all that I have said thus far proves to the hilt that there is none), I still do not see why our brahmins should not be allowed to wear it. I say this for a number of reasons. First, it is certain that by now the whole town is perfectly aware of the fact that our brahmins are wearing the caste thread solely on the ground that they belong to the brahmin caste and as a social distinction. This meaning too, unquestionably and to the knowledge of everybody, is inherent in the wearing of the thread. Second, the state tolerates it, nor has it ever raised any objection against our brahmins' wearing the thread. Indeed, in a way it approves the practice of imposing it on our brahmin converts. Why indeed should a fresh imposition be considered unlawful when the state authority allows it? Third, this should be done especially if there are urgent reasons to do it as, for instance, when there is a formidable danger of forfeiture of one's eyesight, one's dignity, one's whole family estate, as will be explained in the last chapter. When such a pressing danger threatens, theologians teach, in the context of *Summa Theologiae* II.II, that Christians are at liberty, despite even a state edict of prohibition, to make use of insignia that imply a double application or double effect, one civil and the other superstitious. So much for this town of Madurai.

Let us turn to other towns in India which are similarly subject to heathen rulers. There too, sufficient reasons, also based on experimental knowledge and practice, obtain in allowing our neophytes to use the brahmin thread. The main reason is that regarding religious affairs and sacred observances throughout the commonwealth of India, there is nothing fixed and strictly determined; this too may be inferred from what has been explained in Chapter Four. On the contrary, there are innumerable sects and creeds, and daily new sects crop up, each imposing new rules of its own, changing the old ones as it pleases. The state itself urges nothing to the contrary but, as the common practice shows, allows all its citizens full liberty in matters of religion and sacred functions.

7.9. A New Community, with its Bishop, can Give a New Meaning to the Thread

Hence, even if there were an element of superstition mixed up with this practice of wearing the brahmin thread — although as I have said, there is absolutely none — this new Christian community of ours could quite legitimately change the old practice through the bishop, its head and pastor, and impose a new meaning in the matter of the thread, while forestalling any occasion of scandal among ours, should any such occasion happen to present itself, by proper admonition and other precautions. Indeed, it stands to reason that a community which is independent and in no way subject to another community is perfectly entitled to draw up for itself a new statute and new observance, different from those in vogue among different communities. Reason itself declares this, and the practice commonly in force among nations, even among Christian nations, attests to this. As a matter of fact, there is at present hardly any Christian nation which did not lay down new laws in opposition to the law of Caesar after so many states had broken away from the imperial sway of Caesar. I pass over the fact that by reason of the law of nations another law has come to be recognized, that of the bishops. This law bears a divine and higher character which entitles bishops to make decisions in matters that concern religion, even over and against communities still dominated by heathendom. It was in this way that in ancient times

bishops managed to give an orientation towards Christian piety, and to elevate socially certain customs and institutions which the heathen had overlaid with truly and definitely superstitious trends. This is a subject I shall touch upon in my next chapter.

7.10. Objections

7.10.1. The Proponents of *Māyā* Use the Thread as a Symbol of the Gods

You will object that at least the proponents of *māyā* use the brahmin thread as a sign of their superstitious creed, since they apply it to the god Brahmā and to other gods as well. In my answer, I shall deal first with what concerns other gods, and then with what concerns Brahmā in particular. As for other gods, we have it on the authority of the proponents of *māyā* that these gods took on different forms, some this and some that; over and over they have assumed this or that nature, not excepting human nature. In this latter case they have paraded now as brahmins, now as kings, now as merchants, now as plebeians of one or the other group. This explains why, according to the particular social class they assumed, they were shown invested with the thread customarily attributed to that class and therefore to themselves. It is therefore false to say that all the gods were thus invested with the thread, for this is found only with some of them, namely those who are said to be descended from a stock that traditionally wears the distinct garland of the thread. For these men do not represent their gods otherwise than in the form of the incarnations and transformations they have assumed. So much then regarding these other gods.

7.10.2 The Proponents of *Māyā* use the Thread as a Symbol of Brahmā

Regarding Brahmā in particular, I answer that these idolaters are wont to invest him with the thread because they regard him as the god of wisdom. Therefore, they also believe him to be named after wisdom, and define him accordingly: *brahmate iti brahmā*, i.e., "He is called Brahmā because he knows." He is credited as being joined in marriage with the goddess Sarasvatī whom they identify with wisdom itself, speech, and learning. For the same

reason they attribute to Brahmā the creation of the world and of all that the world contains, on the assumption that wisdom is the cause of the world. Hence we have this Smṛti: *nāsti satyāt param dharmo, nānṛtāt pātakaṁ kvacit lokasthitiśca dharme 'smin tasmāt satyaṁ viśiṣyate.* I.e., "There is no virtue superior to truth; there is no evil worse than falsehood, since by the agency of this power the world has come into existence. Therefore, there is no power greater than truth." They say that this god produces all things precisely because he knows all things. Hence this dictum in Kālidāsa (*Kumāra Sambhava* 2.10): *ātmānam ātmanā vetsi sṛjasy ātmānam ātmanā.* I.e., "You contemplate this world with your spirit and thus by the spirit you create the world." Further down it says, *vedyaṁca veditā cāsi dhyātā dhyeyaṁ ca tat param* (*Kumāra Sambhava* 2:15). I.e., "You are worthy to be known, you are the one who knows, you are the one who is contemplated." Since our Indians thus consider the thread as the distinctive mark of wisdom, it is not surprising that the idolater proponents of *māyā* attribute it to Brahmā, as the patron and, so to speak, the father of the wise.

7.10.3 Several Symbols Originally Attributed to the Gods Have Now Become Social Customs in the West

Indeed, it will hardly strike us as a novelty that something which by attribution men use as a social symbol of wisdom should likewise be assigned by the heathens to those gods of theirs whom they imagine to be the protectors of wisdom. So is it in our home countries with the wand, which even now figures as the symbol of the teaching profession and of learning. We ourselves are eyewitnesses to the present usage. That it was so in the past, writers of first-class fame like Hesiod, Homer, and Plato, record here and there in their works. What then? Well, did not our own pagan ancestors represent Mercury and Pallas, whom they dubbed as gods of wisdom, with wands in their hands? What of Circe, whom they regarded as the goddess of incantations, most skilled in her art? Indeed, one of their tales has it that Abaris the Scythian, a most learned man, had received from Apollo himself the arrow he is represented with and which, they say, is nothing other than a wand. As for Hesiod, one of their commentaries has it that he was

presented by the Muses themselves with a wand in recognition of his exquisite poetical skill.

I will pass over the laurel wreath with which poets are crowned and with which they commonly represent Apollo, the god of the Muses. I will say nothing of the scepter, the most common distinctive mark of kings, with which they were wont to represent Jupiter and which, they say, had come from Jupiter. What wonder can there be, then, if those brahmins who are idolaters should also invest Brahmā, whom they hold to be the god of sciences, with that thread which among these Indian people is considered the symbol of learning, or that the poets, when they extol the praises of wisdom, should proclaim that it proceeded from Brahmā at some time in the past, and that the thread as a sign of wisdom had its origin with Brahmā?

7.11. Objection 2: The Thread is Bad because it is also the Emblem of False Doctrine

In the second place you may raise the following objection. Granted that the brahmin thread stands for the distinctive mark of wisdom in general, yet under that same wide sense they also include that sacred science which ultimately is proved false, since those who profess it are non-Christians. So the thread is the emblem of a false doctrine which is yet included in wisdom taken in a wide sense, and thus the thread too is bad. As for me, I should hesitate to propose this objection, were it not for the fact that, I am told, a certain gentleman worries his head with doubts precisely on this point. But what indeed is there in this objection that should present so much as the semblance of a difficulty?

7.11.1 In the first place, the thread does not stand for wisdom taken in a collective sense, as if any type of thread could symbolize the entire collection of sciences pursued throughout India. Who could envisage so fantastic a thing? On the contrary, the thread is distinctive essentially in the same manner as other insignia of a similar order. I.e., it is a distinctive badge of such a nature that it can be used to signify the possession of any science or art, even though it is very imperfect or even mechanical, and even though it

is found alone and unaccompanied by any other knowledge. We have seen what the thread signifies in general. It signified and signifies exactly in the same manner as our wand and other such emblems signify.

7.11.2 Next, when these Indian people established the thread as a sign of knowledge in general, even in the field of the sacred sciences, they did not mean any particular sacred science or any definite collection of sacred sciences. From the day on which the thread was worn for the first time, sacred science in India has kept changing to a most astonishing extent, as we have already seen. Since that time new sects and new creeds and new practices have kept cropping up. Even at present new forms keep coming forward, day after day. Yet the thread remains unchanged and is used by everyone.

7.11.3 Again, as likewise noted above, the sacred laws too vary from one part of the country to another and in various countries. This plethora of variations gives rise to the saying *anantā Vedāḥ*, i.e., "Innumerable are the laws." Therefore, in the matter of sacred science too, when the name "Veda" (knowledge in general) is applied to it, they understand it not collectively but distinctively, without excluding any branch of learning.

7.12. The Thread is not a Symbol of Sacred Science Excluding Christianity

To say that those who first gave a symbolic meaning to the thread intended it to signify precisely the false sacred sciences as such, even to the extent of positively excluding Christ, is simply ridiculous. Rather, it must be admitted that in clothing it with symbolism they meant it to symbolize particularly the true science, if any such exists, and whichever it might turn out to be, unless they decidedly meant to deceive. Certainly, before the coming of Christ the wand in vogue among the Gentiles was similarly a symbol of doctrine of any kind whatsoever, even of the sacred brand, which at the time was everywhere tainted with falsehood. So too the laurel wreath was a symbol of poetry, which bristled everywhere with false conceptions and superstitious narratives. But

it never entered the mind of anyone, even of any Christian (I venture to say), to pronounce the significance of those emblems as oriented to false doctrines in such a manner as to exclude Christ such that, on that score, they would have to be rejected or require for use the dispensation of the Church, or something similar.

Any other objections, if there are any which have not been solved by what I have presented thus far, will be explained in the penultimate chapter of this treatise. It is therefore my firm conviction that the brahmin thread contains no element of superstition, even by second intention. It is no more than a social badge to mark the grade and office of a man of learning.

Furthermore, those neophytes who recently gave information to the council fathers at Goa made an inexpert and false report. My statement applies to the brahmin thread in particular. There is also no reason to be in any doubt regarding the others, namely, the rulers, the merchants, etc., and their respective threads, as has been seen above. Nor, indeed, has anyone raised a doubt about them, since the council itself deliberated solely on the brahmin thread. I am therefore of opinion that even in practice the rulers, merchants, and various craftsmen should be allowed the use of the thread without any fresh authorization from prelates, at least in this realm of Madurai where in the present circumstances this permission is urgently required.

7.13. Passive Scandal to an Occasional Portuguese Visitor cannot Impede the Legitimate Use of the Thread

Surely it is not a sufficient reason for forbidding them the use of these threads to allege, as I hear somebody is alleging, that if some Portuguese or other person happened to pass through this place and saw a man of the royal class invested with the thread, he might mistake him for a brahmin acting in contravention to the Council and without a dispensation from the prelates. For I feel that such a reason is far too lame an excuse for closing up the avenue leading to the conversion of souls.

For it is undeniable that these men find themselves in a painful dilemma. If they refuse to believe, they risk falling into the greatest of spiritual evils, the loss of their souls; if they embrace the faith and do not wear the thread, they incur the greatest of temporal evils, the loss of personal dignity, and the forfeiture of their family goods and property. What sort of philosophy is this? Is it thinkable that for the sake of a trivial and false opinion put forward by a few men, it would become necessary to ordain that these converts of ours should subject themselves inevitably to either of these evils? Whoever held the view that scandal even of the passive kind should be avoided at so heavy a cost and so grievous a hurt? I pass over the fact that the rulers, the merchants, and the others whom we are discussing follow usages far different from those of the brahmins, in matters of dress and other bodily exigencies. This is a fact fairly well known to everybody. I also pass over that fact that when the Portuguese happen to come over to this town (one or the other may turn up in the course of the year, but very few indeed), they always put up with our people in the other residence our Order owns in Madurai, so that they can easily be made wise about the truth concerning these customs.

7.14. The Case of the Official Priests like Nambis and Śaivadvijas

But what will be said about the Nambis and Śaivadvijas, those two particular groups among the idolaters who, as I have pointed out, are set apart for the priestly office? Are they to be excluded from the kingdom of God on the ground that they too wear the thread? For we shall be able (humanly speaking) to ask them to get rid of the thread only when they will have made up their mind to be degraded from their caste and to suffer the loss of all those advantages which make human life worth living. This will be explained in the last chapter of the dissertation, but actually I am not much concerned about these Nambis and Śaivadvijas. What I am solicitous about is the fate of the authentic brahmins, namely those who constitute the first grade of citizens, as I indicated at the beginning of my first chapter. For on them, as I see it, the salvation of the whole of India depends, as will be explained in my last chapter. As for the Nambis and Śaivadvijas, they are few in number, and they hold but a low position in the social scale.

Therefore, they are of very little, if any, importance for the conversion of the people at large. I maintain, however, that it would be no less unfair to deny the members of these two groups the use of the thread because although it is in accordance with the law of the land that the priests are to be selected exclusively from these families, yet the distinctive mark of this priestly power is neither proximately nor remotely identified with the thread. The simple reason is that the right to wear the thread conceded to these families reposes solely on the common title based on learning, insofar as the said families are listed together with those families whose numbers may, if they so desire, go into study and learning.

But the distinctive badge of the priestly function is something quite different. It consists in a peculiar style of laying on the sacred ashes, tracing the *nāmam*,[98] and in other superstitious signs. They begin to practice these peculiar observances after they have been lawfully initiated by a ceremony and sacred rite prescribed severally for each sect, in view of the fact that priestly ordination is conferred on the chosen candidates, as previously explained. For the rest, to decide on keeping them out of the fold for no reason other than that they belong to a family from which the idolaters recruit their priests is altogether unfair and alien to the practice of the Church, as I have remarked above, at the end of Chapter Five.

[98] A distinctive sectarin mark.

Chapter Eight

Verdict on the Tuft of Hair, Called the *Kuṭumi*

Those inexperienced neophytes who reported the brahmin cord to the fathers [at Goa] may have had some misgivings concerning its nature even if, as shown from the evidence I have produced, these misgivings were of course quite mistaken and based on insufficient grounds. Yet on the matter of the so-called *kuṭumi* [hair-tuft] it seems to have been deemed unnecessary to produce even a scrap of evidence to show that it was in any way involved in the same question. In fact, not even the semblance of any probability or plausible reason can be adduced to pass condemnation on it. Therefore, neither has our Father General made mention of it in his rescript, nor have our Fathers of the Goan Province who have passed censure on certain observances mentioned the *kuṭumi*. Indeed, the wearing of the *kuṭumi* is held by all our brahmins and by the Gentiles among the other castes as so exclusively social in import that if anyone were to find fault with it on religious grounds, they would laugh him to scorn.

8.1. The Tuft of Hair is Peculiar to the High Castes

As for the nature of the *kuṭumi*: the name stands for a tuft of hair kept on one or another part of the head [while the rest is shaved]. That no religious meaning is implied in the wearing of it is proven with even greater force by all the arguments which were adduced on the subject of the thread, since these arguments hold equally for both. But apart from these the licit use of the *kuṭumi* rests on an independent foundation of its own. Its usage was introduced with a view that by this sign the various noble families among the brahmins, rulers, and merchants might be distinctly marked off. Because these different groups descend, so to speak, from different heads, it was arranged among them that in keeping with the difference in the heads of the groups, each group should adopt the fashion of keeping a tuft of hair on a different part of the head. A similar fashion prevailed of old in Italy, to distinguish those two notorious factions, the Ghibelines and the Guelphs. One party chose the right, the other, the left side of the head, so that

their adherence to one or the other party could be made out. In India, the noble families choose to wear the tuft of hair in different parts of the head, not from any motive of faction and hostility, but solely as distinctive caste marks showing their respective social grades. Thus, one group has the lock of hair hanging at the back of the head on the right side, another at the back on the left; yet another keeps it on top of the head, and so forth.

Indeed, it is clearly indicated in the *Laws of Manu*, in the first *brahmacāri* section, that the fashion of wearing the tuft of hair in the manner described is peculiar to the three higher castes. There, the whole matter is crystallized in two words, namely, *cūḍākarma dvijātinām*, i.e., "The use of the *kuṭumi* is peculiar to the twice-born," i.e., to the brahmins, the rulers, and the merchants, for it is to these higher castes that the common appellation "twice-born" applies. Hence the commentary adds the remark: *dvijāti grahṇena śūdraṁ paryudasyati*. I.e., "By using the term 'twice-born' *Manu*, the author of Smṛti, excludes the plebeians." That the tuft of hair was introduced with a view toward distinguishing the various families within the same caste or grade, however, *Manu* teaches in the same passage in these words: *sarveśam eva dharmataḥ*. I.e., "For all three superior orders (the *kuṭumi*) is a distinctive mark within their particular caste." To that effect the commentator gives the following explanation, *dharmataḥ kuladharmataḥ*. I.e., "The author uses the term *dharmataḥ* to set forth the underlying reason, that it is a distinctive mark of that family."

8.2. Varieties in the Tuft of Hair Signifies Varieties of Families

Finally, the various parts of the head are assigned precisely for the purpose of clearly marking off the various families, as the same commentator proceeds to prove in this passage: *cūḍā deśā viśeṣaśca gotraviśeṣeṇa smaryate*. I.e., "The exact location of the *kuṭumi* on the head and the manner of tying it up must conform to each particular family." He adds, *dakṣiṇataḥ cūḍā vāsiṣṭhānām, vāmato Bhāradvājānām, ubhayataḥ Kāśyapānām iti*, i.e., "The family of the Vaśiṣṭas must keep the *kuṭumi* on the right side of the head, the family of the Bharadvājas on the left side, the family of the Kaśipas on both sides." The same rule is laid down in the

Āpastamba Sūtra: *yathā ṛṣi śikhā nidadhāti yathā vaiṣāṁ kuladharmaḥ syāt*,. I.e., "The *kuṭumi* is to be kept on the head in conformity with the chief of the family; so indeed let the *kuṭumi* be for these families their distinct family badge." Similarly, in the *Anusthānavīti Sūtra* mention is made of the same distinction: the Vaśiṣṭa brahmins are to keep the *kuṭumi* at the back of the head, on the right side; the Jamadagni brahmins, on the left side; the Guggilier[99] brahmins, in the middle on top of the head; the Chola brahmins, two fingers breadthwise from the middle, towards the forehead.

Let me stop with these few references concerning the *kuṭumi*. They will suffice, I should think. Few as they are they make it clear how anyone who wishes to satisfy himself concerning the customs and insignia of these people and indeed to inform the prelates of India about them without risking mistakes, must have a thorough knowledge of their books.

8.3. If the Tuft is Forbidden, Conversion is Impossible

One more observation. Although the *kuṭumi* refers properly to the aristocracy of the land, i.e., to the three superior orders, by now its use has become quite common to all the social orders without exception, since in fact all the plebeians, even those whose condition is lowest, use it by way of adorning and beautifying their heads. Some do so until they outgrow adolescence, some to the end of their lives. I want it to be understood that just as by forbidding the use of the thread, all hope (humanly and normally speaking) of converting the aristocracy to Christ is gone, so also by forbidding the use of the tuft of hair there left absolutely no hope of converting any section of the population into whom the seed of the heavenly doctrine might fruitfully be cast. As the Indians themselves have repeatedly thrown into my face, we do this[100] without any plausible reason, since it is impossible to present any evidence of a superstitious character in this or similar usages in general, as I shall point out later on.

[99] Reference uncertain.

[100] I.e., make this prohibition of the *kuṭumi*.

Chapter Nine

The Use of Sandal Paste, and the Scholar's Mark

9.1.1 Sandal Wood

Sandalwood is a kind of scented wood most pleasant to the smell and, as the physicians of this locality maintain, health-giving and very beneficial to bodily well-being. It is an offspring of India, but it is fairly well-known in Europe and was described by Ruellius. Reduced to a kind of ointment by mixing it with musk, saffron, camphor, zebith and other aromatic substances of the same king, this wood is used to anoint the body, and is valued by our Indians in the same way as cosmetics of various sorts are valued in Europe. They make great use, too, of unmixed sandal for anointing, as even by itself it emits a very sweet odor, relished by these people above any other. The best variety, in their opinion, is the one the Portuguese merchants import from the kingdom of Malacca. (There are three varieties of sandal, while, red and yellow, which they combine into a mixture they call trisandal, an admixture also in use in Europe, as the same Ruellius reports.) But, as I said, the most highly prized variety is the one from Malacca, yellow-colored and so refreshing to the body that if it is poured into hot water, the water, they are wont to say, immediately turns cold. Whether this is true or an hyperbolical statement I leave to be tested by experiment.

9.1.2 Its Use is Purely Social and Ornamental

One thing is certain and beyond all doubt, namely that the use of the sandal paste as an ointment rubbed over the body smacks of no superstitious belief, but serves solely to lend a glossy and pleasing appearance to the body. Witness the practice common among the St. Thomas Christians[101] of anointing their body and forehead with the sandal mixture, as I have seen for myself. Witness too the usage among the Christian Paravas[102] of the Fishery

[101] I.e., the older Christian community which preceded the arrival of the European missionaries and which traced itself back to Thomas the Apostle.

[102] These are converts drawn from poor fisher families on the south Indian coast.

Coast who also besmear their body with the sandal cosmetic on the occasion of marriages and similar festive celebrations. Witness too the Turks and the followers of every other creed or school, not excepting the atheists: all of them delight in using the sandal preparation.

Finally, take the Portuguese themselves, for not a few of them often apply the sandal mixture as a refreshing lubricant against the heat. Besides, they not only use it as a staple commodity for trade, but they themselves, as well as religious men, are wont to make a present of it to unbelievers, which is evidence that in the common estimation of the Portuguese the use of sandal in itself and as an ingredient is in no way deemed superstitious by the Indians, but rather is thought of purely as a social usage. Otherwise, how could the presentation of it as a gift be excused from sin? Moreover, if the use of the sandal paste is condemned, the condemnation must necessarily be extended too to musk, saffron, and all other similar perfumes, since they are all alike put by the Gentiles to one and the same use, as will be shown further on. So I shall refrain from expatiating at length upon this matter of the sandal paste, regarding its material substance and the simple and endless use for anointing to which it is put, since it is clear to me that nobody can have any doubt about it.

9.1.3 Proof from Written Books

Besides, were I to start upon a thorough confirmation of it from written authorities, an entire book could not contain them all. Take for instance that common advice recorded in the book entitled *Bhāratam*, where the author recommends, among other things apt to beautify and brighten up the body's complexion, the application of the sandal paste: *candra candana kastūri karpūraṁ kumkumādikam alakṣmi parihārārtham, nityaṁ kuru, yudhiṣṭhira.* I.e., "To remove dirt and the lack of beauty, Yudhisthira, always apply white sandal paste, musk, camphor, saffron, and other similar cosmetics." In the *Mahāmātmyam* the accoutrements of the king are described as follows: *śvetāśvaṁ ratham āruhya śveta chatra samanvitaḥ, sālaṁkāras sugandhaśca sapuṣpo.* I.e., "(Let the king) drive forth in a carriage drawn by white horses, protected

from the heat of the sun by a white umbrella held aloft and by fans on either side of him, anointed with select sandal paste, wreathed with a garland of flowers, etc." These men honestly used the sandal paste for the purpose of adding brightness and luster to their bodily complexion.

I admit that sandal paste was sometimes used also by persons swayed by impure passion. In the *Bhārata* we have a description of the way a dissolute lover prepared himself to meet his mistress: *pūṁkāvane sakusumāni navāni hṛtvā piṁgānīle* puḻuku *candanam ādadhānaḥ*. I.e., "He collected fresh flowers in the garden, and took with him a flask of musk perfume and sandal paste." As for the dissolute woman, she is shown by Ācana Dīkṣita to be arrayed as follows: *talaiyile dhṛta mallikā mālayā, mulaiyile nava candana sārayā, alaiyite mama mānasam ekayā, valaiyile vipaten mṛgarāṭ iva.* I.e., "On account of that woman whose head is wreathed with flowers, whose breasts are anointed with fresh sandal paste, my mind is thus flung hither and thither and whirled round and round like a wild goat caught in the net of a huntsman."

9.1.4 Missionaries May Use them Following the Example of Christ, Apostles and Saints

But why should I pile up testimonies in a matter which is so evident and about which, to my knowledge, no one entertains any doubt at all? The only doubt that may possibly present itself to the mind of some persons, I find to be this: does it become a preacher of the Gospel to use such perfumery, in which these heathen men taken such delight? In the light of reason and factual experience, this objection too proves to be rather weak. For just as it becomes a preacher of the Gospel to appear mean and poor when such an appearance is conducive to the greater glory of God and to the salvation of souls, so also it beseems the same preacher of the Gospel to surround himself with some distinction and respectability when this is thought necessary for the praise and glory of God and for the welfare of souls.

Take the example of St. Paul. Surely he was a man enamored with the love of abjection and destitution from human pomp, and

he gloried in the fact that he was unknown to fame, financially insecure, and without resources for the sake of saving souls, living so poorly that he denied himself the service of pious women, whom the other apostles made use of quite legitimately. Yet he did not desist at other times, when it was necessary to extol the dignity of his family and birth place and to uncover the noble qualities with which he was more richly endowed than others.

Just as St. Paul chose for the greater glory of God to go about preaching like a poor and obscure man, so for the sake of the same divine glory did St. James wear about his head a gold ribbon, the badge of royal dignity, as is related by St. Epiphanius in *Heresies* 29 and 79,[103] by St. Jerome in *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis.*,[104] and by other writers. The same usage was adopted by St. John the Evangelist, as we read in Eusebius, *Historiae*,[105] chapter 51. Baronius,[106] in his *Anno Christi* 34, sets it down as a believable tradition that the other apostles, too, followed the same practice.

Neither did our holy Father Francis Xavier hesitate to copy the same usage when he saw that the glory of God demanded it. Thus, in Japan he removed his customary humble dress and assumed robes of silk and various ornaments. Indeed, the religious of our Order who followed in his footsteps on the China Mission and are engaged in the task of winning over souls for Christ our Lord always appear in public dressed in silken garments, wearing a long beard, their fingernails and hair well trimmed, and holding a fan of honor in their hand.

As for cosmetics and perfumes, I fail to see why the use of them by a preacher of the Gospel should be objected to and considered a

103 Bishop Epiphanius, renowned for his controversies with heretics, wrote the *Panarion* (*Heresies*).

104 Perhaps, Honorius of Autun (ca. 1080-ca. 1156), De luminaribus siue scriptoribus ecclesiasticis. He also wrote a work entitled, De haeresibus.

105 See N. 12 on Eusebius.

106 Caesar Baronius (1538-1607) was a famous Church historian, author of the *Annales Ecclesiastici* in twelve volumes.

source of uneasiness when from its use some advantage is to be expected. Do we not read that Christ himself, the master of preachers, allowed himself the use of such things and praised it in others? He was well aware that in his time both the Jews and the heathens not only found their delight in them, but also that sometimes the heathen were turning their use to objectionable purposes, even to the extent of dedicating them to false gods, as we shall see further on. It should be noted, however, that this practice of applying the sandal paste, which I consider to be a necessity for us, is not sought for the sake of display or of pleasure, but to serve as a distinctive sign of the rank of teacher or doctor in any science, as will be shown later in this very chapter. That it is a necessity and a very suitable means for procuring the conversion of souls and the glory of God will be made clear from what will be said later in this chapter itself.

9.2. The Sandal Mark on the Forehead

9.2.1. The *Tilakam* as an Adornment for the Forehead

So then the only objection a few persons raise against the use of the sandal paste is that the people here display it on their forehead, an objection that is of course based on their ignorance of the customs of this nation. Among these people the custom of marking their forehead in one way or another is so ancient, so deeply impressed by them from the very cradle, that is becomes second nature to them, such that no reasoning will ever bring them to believe that there is anywhere a freeborn man who fails to mark his forehead with some sign or another. Therefore, no one anywhere will venture to present himself either at the palace of the king or of any notable personage or at a meeting of high caste men without having his forehead rubbed over or at least dotted with some cosmetic. For they hold the view that to leave the forehead unmarked ill becomes a free man. Nor will you anywhere in this realm meet a man whose forehead is devoid of this ornamental appendage, unless it be perchance some stranger or someone whom they would class among people of the lowest social standing.

9.2.2 Primary Purpose is Ornamental, Secondary may be Religious

It is indeed true that many idolaters often turn this common and purely social custom into an abuse and mark their forehead with a sign of their false sect, e.g., the lining with ashes (which is the sign of the devotees of Śiva), or the lining with white clay (i.e., the *nāmam*, which is the sign of the devotees of Viṣṇu), or other similar symbols. But this is the outcome of a peculiar practice and has certainly been introduced among the people here in much the same way as customs prevalent among the peoples in Europe, where the habit of dressing up the body, a universal habit originally intended for the preservation of life and for marking some social distinction, has led religious institutes to adopt a special color and a distinctive form of dress to distinguish their particular Order and founder from other orders and founders. Yet just as this peculiar practice among religious institutes in Europe of adopting a distinctive religious habit does not interfere with the ordinary custom common among all nations of clothing the body out of necessity or for the sake of ornament, so too in India the peculiar usage adopted by some idolaters of marking their forehead with the specific symbol of their sect does not alter the meaning and character of that universal and purely social custom of using various cosmetic preparations to adorn their forehead, as a purely social expression of culture.

9.2.3 Components of the *Tilakam*

Now the chief ointments used for merely cultural purposes are six in number: musk, musk from the civet cat, saffron, camphor, the so-called xani (prepared from a powder, black in color), and sandal. The so-called *cantapuri* powder is not generally condensed into a lump by itself, but is fused into a complex from all kinds of aromatic ingredients and is rubbed mostly on the neck and on the chest, rarely on the forehead. But of all the cosmetics used for frontal decoration, the first and most highly prized variety is sandal-paste, whether formed in combination with other fragrant substances or unmixed since, as I said before, its smell by itself is most exquisite. Hence, strictly speaking, these people say that just as the respectability of the body comes from the dress one wears, so the luster of the forehead comes from the sandal paste put on it.

This is a common saying taken perhaps from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: *dehalamkāraṇam vastram, nitilalamkṛtir gandhaḥ*. I.e., "The ornament of the body is the dress, the ornament of the forehead is the sandal mark."

9.2.4 Shape of the *Tilakam*

Furthermore, in bedecking the forehead with sandal paste, or with any of the six cosmetics used for social purposes, the common manner and shape in vogue among all classes of citizens is the one they call *tilakam*. This is a tiny little mark in the center of the forehead between the eyebrows, occupying just that much spot as can be impressed by the extremity of one finger. That this sandal mark is altogether free from superstition and that it stands for nothing more than a social ornament is so sure and so much beyond doubt that, to say the truth, I feel ashamed to start confirming it. Indeed, if we take our stand on popular practice, we shall find no one, be he ever so profane, so unbelieving, so independent of every law, who does not adorn his forehead with this mark. If, on the other hand, it comes to corroborating my statement with references from books, I have produced quite a number of them in that memorandum I wrote three years back.[107] So I am at a loss to see what stronger evidence could be presented, and what objection could be raised to contradict it, unless it chances to be the attestation of that single person — who has neither any knowledge of the Sanskrit literature of this nation from which these things have to be learned, nor so much as a nodding acquaintance with the very characters of that language. That man, inspired by some old prejudice created in his mind on the strength of false information given him years back, cannot but err and deceive himself on many points, due to ignorance of the language. If he knew the language, of course, he would be able to ascertain the truth on these points.

But in a matter of such supreme importance as the salvation of India, any good and fair-minded judge will surely examine, I should think, what the opposing witnesses have to say, as well as

[107] I.e., the *Apology*.

the fundamental principles proposed by learned men, and weigh seriously what fundamentally underlies the whole of this controversy. So it will come about that the truth of the matter at issue will become known and that the consciences of the witnesses who come forward to make a deposition solely out of fear of sin will be freed from religious scruples. For indeed, as far as I am concerned, I could wish nothing better than to escape from the whole business, and to refrain even from speaking about these matters, the more so as I am aware that a certain person is annoyed at what I say. But as I said right at the beginning of this memorandum, the fear of sin compels me to speak, for I see only too clearly that the truth is being suppressed and that the avenue to the conversion of India is being closed up without rhyme or reason. Regarding the subject of the *tilakam*, I recently prepared up to a hundred references from books, and I might quite comfortably gather another six hundred more, and then yet another six hundred, and many more still. But I refrain from piling them up lest, in a matter absolutely plain for all to see, somebody ascribe my zeal to a craving for vain display.

9.2.5 Testimony from Authors

For, I ask, is there in the literature of this country any book treating of common subjects, any historical records, any piece of poetry, in which the theme runs on to descriptions of ways and devices of ornamentation and enjoyment but then omits to mention forthwith the use of the *tilakam*?

Consult the *Bhikṣāṇṭanam*,[108] in which we read about womenfolk who, when they have to appear in the presence of some great man, never present themselves except arrayed in all womanly finery and, above all, adorned with the *tilakam*. Read the *Rāmāyaṇa, cūrṇaka* section, where you will find it recorded that king Daśaratha, in admiring the beauty of his royal son's face, particularly commended the *tilakam* on his forehead. Look up the *Amalabhānam*, in which we are informed that no woman can take

[108] The specific literary works referred to in the following section for the most part have not been identified.

part in stage plays or join the choral dancers without the frontal *tilakam* ornament. See also the *Accia Maṇipravāḷam*, where it says that a beautiful woman is known by her anklets and her frontal *tilakam* decoration. Read the *Rāmābhyudayam*, *Nalodayam*, *Acyutarāyābhyudayam*, and other poems. Read the *Bhāṇi* (poetic encomium) and all the *nāṭakas* (dramas), and you will find that hardly anyone is ever mentioned there, be he man, courtier, fine young man, lover, husband, or any woman, be she a married woman or even a prostitute or harlot of immoral habits, without that person being described as bedecked on the forehead with the *tilakam*. All consider it as one of the chief implements of refined society and the indispensable ornament of the forehead. Listen to the lament of king Rāma demented by the loss of his queen in the first part of the *Āraṇya Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: *eṣa vyaktam vijānāti tilakas tilakastriyām*. I.e., "This very tree saw my queen conspicuous for her *tilakam*." Or hear from the book *Somal bhāṇam* how Śṛṇgara Śekhara describes the woman with whom he was enamored: *kalpita candana tilakam karṇa parisphurita kanakatāṭaṁkam kabaḷayati mānasam me kāntaṁ karṇā kāmini vadanam*. I.e., "Resplendent by the sandal *tilakam* impressed on her forehead and by her earrings made of pure gold hanging from her ears, Kannarici wounds my heart with the arrow of love." About another woman we read: *cakāra sāyan tilakam laḷāte cāru bhruvor madhyagatam kaḷaṁkam cāmikar āṇgyāḥ sahasā vilokya candrāyam āyāti nirastaśaṁkaḥ*. I.e., "Appearing most elegantly adorned with the *tilakam* which she had impressed between her beautiful eyebrows, her limbs shining like gold, she boldly steps forth." Kālidāsa, admiring Śakti particularly because of this select decoration, prays to her in these words: "You, with the elegant saffron *tilakam* impressed on your forehead, are most beautiful."

So we see that of all bodily embellishments, the *tilakam*, especially when made of sandal paste, is held to be the most attractive. Thus, in describing an orator about to give a discourse, the *Kuṣma Purāṇam*[109] says the following: *viśeṣakam alamkṛtam vividha bhūṣaṇadhāritam, gandhas tu alamkṛtam ena dhṛtaṁ*

[109] Reference uncertain.

tenaiva bhāṣitam. I.e., "Along with his elaborate assortment of earrings and gems and other body embellishments, and equally conspicuous by a most ornate *tilakam* and anointed with copious perfume, he began to speak." In the book *Kādambarī*,[110] we have the following: *aṇgeṣv asamalankṛta nūpura kauśeya kāmciguna kaṁkaṇa, keyūrāmgada graiveya bhūṣaṇaṁ patralekhā nāsāmaṇi cikuraibhyo, hyadameva tilakam iti tilamena bhūṣaṇam.* I.e., "I must wear a circlet of gold on the foot, a white silken tunic, a cincture studded with gems, rings for the hands, armlets and bracelets for the arms, ornamental scarves for the shoulders, jeweled necklaces and twisted neck chains, vermillion for the cheeks, jeweled nose-rings, hair-dye which (I say) should be more attractive than all these ornaments, and what surpasses all of it, the *tilakam* on the forehead." So too take this quotation, *parikarma samāpatanāya niṭiladeśa spurita ghanasāra kuṁkuma saṁyutenātipiṁjara bālātapa kalpita candana tilakenāti manoharam.* I.e., "If anyone wishes to impart to his forehead a singular beauty and brilliancy, let him rub it with the *tilakam* of sandal, mixing it with camphor and saffron of a golden color, the color of the sun at early dawn. Let him thus learn which is the most excellent ornament."

I pass over other testimonies lest I unduly lengthen this argument. They can be looked up in the books I have referred to above and other books as well. I omit them because were I to adduce them all in support of a matter so obvious and universally known, I should succeed not so much in winning credence as in producing boredom.

9.3. The *vidyāvardhanam*

9.3.1. The *vidyāvardhanam* is a Symbol, like the Doctor's Cap

The same reasoning applies to that square-shaped front-mark which among these people is a most common badge worn by a learned man, whichever be the faculty in which he is competent or holds a doctor's degree. They call it *vidyāvardhanam* and its import in the brahmins' mentality exactly fits our conception of the

[110] A text by Abhinanda.

doctor's cap, or that of gown and gloves or, in the Chinese empire, the fan and other badges prescribed there as symbols of various offices. For although, as we have indicated above in the chapter concerning the wearing of the thread, the thread is held to be the badge of wisdom or learning and of the rank of men of learning, yet it is a badge common to all, and it means not so much actual possession of wisdom in a brahmin as the right and capacity of pursuing wisdom. The *vidyāvardhanam*, by contrast, signifies the act itself, i.e., the actual possession of wisdom.

Therefore the usage and prescription regarding the *vidyāvardhanam* is quite different from the ruling enforced with respect of the thread. The imposition of the thread is prescribed before anyone starts on the pursuit of learning, whereas that of the *vidyāvardhanam* follows its attainment. In the matter of the thread, as we have pointed out in the above mentioned chapter, the rule is that before a boy enters upon his studies he should be invested with the thread. In the case of the *vidyāvardhanam*, on the contrary, the rule is that it should not be granted except to those who have completed the course. We find witness to this in the book entitled *Bhāgavatam*: *catur aṇgulibhiścai tiryag ūrdhcam vipaścitaṁ dhāryam, nāmādikaṁ sarvam itareṣāṁ na vidyate.* I.e., "The symbolic frontal mark, four finger-breadths wide and four finger-breadths high, of whatever material it may be fashioned, is the distinct badge of learned teachers, men of learning. It is not appropriate to men without culture."

Now it is precisely on this account that it goes by the name *vidyāvardhanam*, i.e., "the symbol of mature learning." It comes from the word *vardhaḥ* which means "to increase." It is also called *vidyāpaṭṭam*, i.e., "the sign of knowledge one is imbued with," since *paṭṭam* denotes the act of "imbuing (investing) with." Thus, a man is said to be *guru-paṭṭam* when he is the holder of the title of teacher, and with *rāja-paṭṭam* when he holds sway over a kingdom to which he has a legitimate claim and in which he has been duly invested. Finally, the *vidyāvardhanam* also goes under the appellation *vaidikapuṁgavaḥ nāmam*, "the sign or emblem of those who excel in learning," i.e., of teachers or learned masters.

9.3.2 It is Not Superstitious

To prove then that this emblem is altogether free from all superstitious implications, and that it may quite appropriately be used by us, I set down the following obvious considerations. On the strength of all I have said thus far, it does not stand out as a specific badge of any particular sect, nor anything tainted by superstition, but simply as an emblem common to all learned men. This is clear from what I have explained just now. Moreover, *vidyā*, for which that emblem stands, specifically denotes nothing other than knowledge or erudition or competence, particularly in the humanities and in profane subjects.

It is obvious, too, from the use of the emblem, since the *vidyāvardhanam* serves as a common sign, applicable to each and every discipline. Indeed, anyone with the title of doctor in the branch in which he graduated and obtained his doctorate, uses it as a public declaration of this competence in his own line. Hence, if a man has qualified himself in *Cintāmaṇi*, i.e., philosophy alone, he wears that emblem to show that he is a master in that particular branch. Another who has specialized in mathematics alone, does the same of his own right. Another may have acquired competence in grammar or in poetry exclusively, and he is similarly entitled to that sign of public recognition, and so too for medicine or any other art or science. All these specialists parade it in like manner. On what ground, then, should anyone be in doubt concerning its significance?

Finally, it is obvious from the fact that the *vidyāvardhanam* is the symbol of knowledge equally shared by all the brahmins, to whichever sect they may belong. This includes the sect of the atheists who admit no religious belief at all, that of the wise who repudiate idol-worship altogether and, among the idolaters, those among them who hold the title of learned men, and who are not bound by a special religious injunction to wear always on their forehead the distinctive and superstitious sect mark. The devotees of Viṣṇu, for instance, are always under obligation to wear on their forehead that type of *nāmam* which is divided into two and which covers the forehead entirely, making it so broad and conspicuous

that it cannot be mistaken for the mark of any other sect. This they do to honor Viṣṇu, their particular deity.

9.4. Reply to Two Objections Raised by One of my Critics

Now, then, since whatever argument and authority may be advanced in opposition to my position is based on the statements of a single critic whose opinion challenges mine, let us attend to these statements. It will be seen that his statements, far from proving to be in conflict with what I have contended all along, will on the contrary very much corroborate my contention, a fact which my opponent would unquestionably have understood were he conversant with the Sanskrit language in which these statements of his are written.

9.4.1. First Objection Answered

So, then, the first statement adduced as an objection to my thesis is one supposedly found in a book written by Manu, son of the sun (god): *lalāṭe tilakam dṛṣṭva nirāśām pitaro gatāḥ*. First of all, I say that Manu, son of the sun, never wrote any book at all, since Manu was a king of whom mention is made in *Raghuvaṁśam*.[111] My critic, therefore, was mistaken, ascribing that statement to the wrong man. He meant (I suppose) that other Manu who published the first book or volume of Smṛti, which surely commands the highest authority. But that quotation is nowhere to be found in the whole of the said volume, which I know just about completely and by heart. However, I finally discovered it in another volume which goes by the name *Candrikā*.

But in truth the interpretation of that verse, word for word, comes down to this: "If the deceased parents chance to see the *tilakam* on the forehead (of their surviving sons), they are sure to depart with sorrow." The question has to do with members of the merchant class, when they perform the funeral rite in honor of their deceased parents. If, on such an occasion, they present themselves conspicuously bedecked with mundane ornaments, the first and

[111] The *Laws of Manu* were traditionally attributed to a Manu, the first human, who was descended from the sun.

most prized being the *tilakam*, the deceased parents, the author pointedly remarks, will be deeply grieved, seeing that even at a time for mourning, their surviving children go in for signs of joy, such as the *tilakam*, which are so little in keeping with feelings of bereavement and sorrow. As for the author referring to the dead parents as *pitṛdevarkaḷ*, i.e., divine parents, there is nothing surprising in this, since it is customary to address father and mother in that way even during their lifetimes, as we have seen in Chapter Six. If then these people apply that common appellation, *pitṛdevarkaḷ*, "divine parents" to their progenitors while they are alive, a fortiori will they do so after their parents' death.

It is obvious, therefore, that the above statement is very much in our favor. Indeed, these people never fail at a time of mourning to display every emblem that is distinctly superstitious, such as the *nāmam*, the ashes, the *śobhacandanam*, and other such insignia. We conclude, therefore, that the *tilakam* is not of a superstitious character. However, that critic of mine pleads that he had the above quotation from a brahmin. True enough, but that text is a Sanskrit text, and it was given him in Tamil script and without explanation of that significant word *nirāśaraḥ*,[112] since that brahmin, whom I know very well, is not a doctor. Little wonder, then, that my critic, ignorant as he was of the true meaning of that word, suspected that it conveyed a different meaning which militated against the use of the *tilakam* from a Christian viewpoint. However, that Sanskrit word is absolutely clear and beyond cavil, for it means "without pleasure" or "with sorrow." (The prefix *nir* meaning "without," plus the word *āśā*, i.e., pleasure, desire, joy.) Therefore, *nirāśaraḥ* denotes a man who is without joy or with sorrow.

9.4.2. Second Objection Answered

A second text which my critic says has been supplied to him by the same brahmin is also transcribed in Tamil characters: *lalāṭe puḍarikaṁ kāryam ūrdhvam tilakam eva vā, caturāciṣṭa*

[112] "Without hope."

samādhānaṁ dhāryaṁ vaidika puṅgavaiḥ.[113] Well, for one thing, I have not come across this text anywhere, although I have searched for it with the utmost care. I asked my critic to indicate the place from which it is taken. He did not know himself; all he could say was that he heard, by hearsay, that the text was found in *Manu* and related writers. I do not quite understand what he means by that, unless perchance he means to say that the passage is found in *Manu* or in some other of the eighteen volumes of Smṛti. This is as if someone in Europe, when questioned about the exact reference of an attestation, were to answer that it is to be found somewhere in the whole body of civil law. I have also consulted one of our brahmin neophytes, a doctor eminently versed in the sciences of this country and particularly in all that concerns the laws. I have also contacted that very same pagan brahmin from whom my critic had received his information, but he was seized by fear and vanished from the scene. I am, therefore, inclined to think that the text is a sheer forgery.

9.4.3. Remarks on This Text

The text confirms this suspicion. It contains a good many errors in language, and in the quantity and order of syllables. Moreover, there is an obvious falsehood in saying that the learned teachers and *vaidika*s mark their forehead with both the *tilakam* and *ūrdhvam* (which is a way of bedecking the forehead with a frontal mark turned upwards), a process that is manifestly false and contrary to every custom. For another thing, whatever may be said about the author or the script of the text in question, the Tamil rendering of the text is far exact and reliable. Although the text mentions the *tilakam*, it says nothing about sandal and *śobhacandanam*; the expositor adds these. Besides, there is another addition introduced by the expositor in the Portuguese version, to the effect that the *tilakam* and the *vidyāvardhanam* are distinct marks for the *vaidika* sect. But the word "sect" is not found in the text; it simply declares that those two badges are the distinct marks of the *vaidika*s, i.e., eminent sages, as we shall see presently.

[113] I.e., "the lotus-mark must be drawn on the forehead or, above, the tilak mark alone; the square mark must be worn by orthodox men."

A third observation I wish to make is this that the very text cited against me admirably serves to confirm the proposition I expounded a while ago concerning the *vidyāvardhanam*. I would in fact have used it for my own purpose, had it an authentic origin and not introduced an error concerning the *tilakam*. For the exposition of the verse as it stands runs as follows: the upward-turned mark on the forehead, the *tilakam*, and the square-shaped figure are worn by those who are among the *vaidikas*, i.e., great men or learned teachers. The last clause of the quoted text is true enough, inasmuch as it declares that the square-shaped figure betokens those among the *vaidikas* who hold the title of learned teachers. The rest of the text, as I have pointed out, is wrong, though insofar as I am concerned it is of no consequence. But the word *vaidika*, on which our debate centers, does not denote any particular sect of the idolaters, as my critic suspects, but simply a body of men who make it their business to pursue the study of the sciences. The meaning therefore is this: those among those engaged in the sciences who have already achieved competence and are teachers of the sciences are the men to be invested with the square-shaped sign of learning.

9.4.4. Meaning and Derivation of the Word *Vaidika*

Now, to ensure that this interpretation is correct, one must know that the word *vaidika* denotes distinctly and primarily "knowledge" in the broad meaning of the term. It is derived from *vidati*, which means "to know," and from the word *vedam*, which means "science" and "art" as well. Hence, they call the medical art *āyurvedam* ("the science of long life"), the military art *dhanurvedam* ("the science of the bow,"), the musical art *gandharvavedam* ("the science of the heavenly musicians"), and so too with the other arts. The word *vaidika* is formed by changing "i" or "e" into "ai," in conformity with the rule *vṛddhirādaic*, found in the *subantam* part of the treatise on grammar. [114] This rule indicates that derivatives are formed by changing simple letters into compound letters or long vowels such as "au," "ai," "ā," "ī," etc.

[114] I.e., in a section of the third book of the *Aṣṭādhyāyi*, the grammar by the greatest Indian grammarian, Pāṇini (c. 5th century BCE).

Thus, for instance, *lokam*, which means "world," becomes *laukikaḥ*, meaning mundane, worldly; *devaḥ*, which means God, becomes *daivikam*, which means "Godhead," "divinity," etc. From *vidati* or *vedaḥ*, which means "to know," we get *vaidikaḥ* or *vaidikā*, which means the "knowing one." It is indeed true that the word *vedam* is also frequently used to denote a law. Thus they say *satyavedam*, i.e., a true law, or *asatyavedam*, a false law, *jñānavedam*, a spiritual law, *ajñānavedam*, a bad law, etc., just as the common term "doctrine" is applied to a specific field of doctrine, such as the doctrine of practical living. This happens in the Hebrew language too, as we are told by expert linguists of that tongue. For instance, "thorath," which means doctrine, is also used to denote "the Law." Similarly, these people sometimes take the word *vaidika* to denote a man who knows the law, as is done by the commentator on the *Laws of Manu* (3.63) when he comments on the following words: *kuvivāhaiḥ kriyālopai nāstikyena ca karmaṇā kulānyakulatāṁ yanti*. I.e., "The destruction of the family arises from the following causes: a marriage contracted with low-caste people, a mode of loving that is unbecoming, familiar intercourse with people in whose opinion nothing exists, i.e., atheists." In explaining this text the commentator remarks, *karmaṇā nāstikena avaidikatvena*. I.e., "By familiarity with people for whom nothing exists, the author understands familiarity with those who prove to be *avaidikas*, i.e., men who acknowledge no law." In the text beginning with the word, *pāṣṭaṇḍino vikarmasthān* (*Manu*, 4.30), *Manu* cautions against keeping company with atheists, and the commentator similarly adds this explanation, *pāṣaṇḍino avaidikaḥ*, i.e., "By 'atheists' *Manu* understands *avaidikas*, men without law."

However, as I have observed before, this word *vaidika* is used more appropriately and more frequently to denote a man who knows, or a man whose chief pursuit is the handling of the sciences. Thus in the same commentary *vaidika* means the same as "one who knows."

Now it is in this sense that the word *vaidika* must be explained whenever one reads that the distinctive sign of the great *vaidika* is the square figure impressed on their forehead. Thus it can be a question only of men of learning, i.e., those among the votaries of learning who have secured a doctorate or some other degree. This is evident. If that word were always to be understood with reference to those who keep the law, in other words, to those who are non-atheists, then one would not see why any ignorant person, provided he paraded as a non-atheist, would not be entitled to wear that particular frontal mark — whereas all evidence goes to show that it is the exclusive privilege of learned teachers.

Nor can it be said that the said term should be strictly restricted to denote such men as are eminently versed in some particular law. For the frontal mark of the *vaidikas* is assumed at pleasure even by atheists who repudiate all the laws. Again, among the brahmins we find a class, called *niyogi*, who are forbidden to take a doctorate in the field of law, since they may not even learn them. Yet, if they have made themselves skilled in philosophy, poetry, or any other branch of learning, they use the same form of frontal distinction. Neither is it reserved to brahmins only. All the other castes, too, use it for the purpose of displaying their proficiency, no matter which science or art they specialize in, and so do many plebeians if they have achieved some skill in one field of culture or another. Finally, very many men of learning, and wise men in particular, do not acknowledge any of the laws of the idolaters, since they choose to stand by no other law than that of nature or of reason, as we saw in Chapters Three and Four. Yet they too use the same mark if they are proficient in doctrine. Therefore, the conclusion is clear.

9.4.5. Third Objection Answered

Apart from these two testimonies taken from Sanskrit sources, the same critic adduced one from Tamil, supplied by a certain paṇḍāram, in which it is said that the sandal paste is used in religious sacrifices. But what of that? There is nothing, be it ever so common, ever so profane, which the people in this land do not use in their sacrifices. But this and many other objections which may be raised against what I have said concerning the insignia of these people by anyone who is ignorant of the customs of this country will be carefully explained in the next chapter.

Chapter Ten

What Rule Should Guide Us in Admitting and Judiciously Deciding about India's Social Customs

10.1. Careful Adaptation is Necessary in Missionary Method

In furthering the conversion of souls and in the matter of adopting or allowing the customs of the unbelievers, the preacher of Christ should always comport himself in such a manner as to preclude anything that is in the least sinful, even were he thereby to secure the conversion of the whole world. He should weigh with all care and discernment which of these customs are purely social, and which are tainted by superstition. Otherwise, it may well happen that in eagerly pursuing the good of creatures, he may betray both the grace of the Creator and the salvation of his own soul, and (as happens not infrequently) ultimately render unstable and altogether unprofitable the very spiritual fruit he expected for the neighbor. But as perfectly true as this principle is, we should beware of that other rule which some people seem to prescribe in deciding matters of custom prevalent among the people here. That rule goes to the other extreme and sins by excessive scrupulosity; it is so radical that, to judge by the common talk, its imposition would entail for these people not only the denial of the very necessities of life, but also the forfeiture of everything. Such an extreme policy (I should think) would find little favor with him who made himself all things to all men that he might win them all to Christ, and who, far from condemning offhand the various customs of the peoples he evangelized, made himself as it were a man outside the law for the sake of those who were outside the law.[115]

10. 2. Three Reasons are Alleged for Condemning certain Customs

Now then, I understand that there are three headings under which not a few take exception, on the plea that there is superstition in the matter of the customs and civil manners of ornamentation in vogue among these nations. Their misgivings, in

[115] The example of St. Paul, of course, is referred to here.

the first place, bear upon certain insignia, on the ground that these people use those same decorations in their idol-worship. Second, others object to other practices because they are told that these heathen men, when observing them, have recourse to some special ritual and recitation. Finally, some other opponents look upon certain objects with suspicion, on the ground that these people regard them as dedicated to various idols and use them as insignia sacred to the gods.

10.3. Life would be Impossible If We Condemn Those Three Categories

Well now, if this three-pronged contention were to be taken just as it stands and without any qualification, it would be absolutely impossible, as I have pointed out, to live in India. Not only Indians, but all of us who live in their midst, would have no chance for salvation. For let it be known that the very attitudes which St. Paul so ardently wished to find among his Christian communities in their relations towards the true God, i.e., that in all they do they should always act in the name of Christ — we find that very attitude practiced to a remarkable degree and with great earnestness and exactness in honor of their idols by the heathens who belong to the idolater sect. Indeed, among them there is no action, be it eating, or drinking, or even inhaling air, in fact anything, even of the most ordinary kind and absolutely necessary for life, that is not in some way tainted by superstition. First I shall proceed to show, one by one, what great inconveniences would arise under those three heads I have indicated above. Then, at the end, I shall propose a line of conduct such as will (unless I be greatly mistaken) easily guide anyone in passing judgment on these matters, without danger of loss to these people and without harm to our souls.

10.4. First Group: Things Used for the Idols

So then, as for the first contention, which intends to forbid the use of anything connected with the sacrifices offered up by the heathen of the idolaters' sect: the answer to this is that if the argument were valid, it would follow that to wash one's feet, to wash one's mouth, to gargle, as well as to wash one's hands before

sitting down to table, to move a chair to sit on — all these would be unlawful because all these things are done, or are rather imagined to be done, by the idol during the sacrifices offered to Rudra. For the priests present the water successively for each ceremonial act in conformity with the law of the Śaivas (the Āgama), which describes this type of sacrifice: *pādyam ācamanīyaṁ ca arghyam āsanādhyaṁ nivedayet.* I.e., "Remember to present water for cleaning his feet (of Rudra), for gargling, for washing the hands, and also to move the chair he sits on."

Again, it would likewise be unlawful to adorn one's body with flowers and wreaths, or to anoint it with various kinds of perfume, because in the same sacrifice these very things are meant to be done by the idol, and so are made ready by the priest. So it is prescribed in the same passage of the law: *bhūribhir gandha kusumaiḥ gandhaiḥ parimaḷair api* . I.e., "Remember to present flower offerings such as exhale rich fragrance and powders emitting an exquisite smell, together with sweet ointments."

That these flower offerings should consist of different kinds of flowers and, particularly, of freshly picked flowers, is also enjoined in that same text: *nānā vidhāni puṣpāṇi nūtanāni prakalpayet.* I.e., "Remember to add flowers of various colors and of every species, recently picked." It is similar regarding scented gifts. The ruling insists on a variety of perfumes, which are not restricted to sandal paste alone nor to any one of the chief scents. That idea is implied in the word itself, *parimaḷam,* but it is also forcefully conveyed in the book *Anantauratam*[116] where we read the following *elālavaṁgakarpūrakastūrikumkumādhikam upakalpyena deveśam arcayet sarvadā Śivam.* I.e., "Let it be it ordained that together with adoration of the overlord of the gods, cardamon, cinnamon, camphor, musk, saffron, and other fragrant substances of this kind also be presented."

Neither would it be lawful to adorn the body by wearing braided neck-chains, earrings, and various gold and jewel-studded

[116] Reference uncertain.

ornaments, because these too serve as decorative apparel in sacrifices to the idols. Witness this ordinance recorded in the Āgama: *bhūṣaṇāni tato datvā punar dhūpaṁ nivedayet.* I.e., "Remember to invest (the idol) with a variety of necklaces, earrings, bracelets and similar ornaments, and to burn incense afterwards."

Again, it would be unlawful to hold up a mirror before one's face, to carry a parasol as a protection against the sun, to use a fan for ventilation, or to light a lamp, on the ground that these articles are used by the idol and also around the idol during the sacrificial function, as the same ordinance has it: *darpaṇaṁ darśayet chatraṁ cāmaraṁ ca nivedayet.* I.e., "Remember to hold up a mirror, open an umbrella, agitate the air with a fan, and light a lamp."

Add to this that it would be forbidden to eat cooked rice, various herbs, and vegetables, bread and desserts of any kind, especially of the choicest kind — in a word, any foodstuff fit to be eaten, because all these eatables are presented to the idol during the sacrifice, and the idol is supposed to consume them, as is prescribed in the same ordinance: *samudgam cāḍhakaṁ cānnaṁ śarkarā madhu samyutam, nivedayet apūpa ādi bhojyaṁ datvā Śivasya tu upadamśaṁ tu sarvaṁ vai naivedyopari vinyaset.* I.e., "Remember to provide as eatables small rolls prepared from the vegetables called *uḷuntu* and *payaru,* and rice richly mixed with sugar and butter. Supply bread, every kind of dessert, everything fit for consumption, every variety of foodstuff."

Again, playing with musical instruments and dancing as relaxation for the mind would be subject to the same condemnation, since these too are prescribed during the sacrifice in order to entertain the spirit of the idol while it eats and is being provided with everything: *tasya mandara gānasya sarva vādya samanvitaiḥ nānā nṛtta samā gitais toṣayet vṛṣabha dhvajam.* I.e., "Provide (the idol) with amusement, by means of choice vocal melodies and by playing the musical instruments, and particularly by choral dances."

Similarly banned, too, would be the use of sandals, upper garments, and other items of clothing, the use of carriages, horses, and other vehicles, because these too are gotten ready and provided for the idol. Nay more, these very things must be venerated by the priests at the time when they are presented to the idol, in accordance with the same ordinances: *tanustrakam vimānaṁ ca pūjaniyaṁ savāhanam, pāḍuka dvitaye pūjyam anyat sarvam anāmakam.* I.e., "See to it that various articles of clothing, a carriage and horse or some other conveyance, a pair of sandals, and every other implement is supplied, after duly venerating the same."

Finally, it would be no less impious to chew the areca nut and the so-called betel leaf, which our Indians mix with lime and are in the habit of chewing at each and every hour of the day. For these too are presented to the idol after all the other items I have mentioned have been performed, as prescribed in the same statute and explained in full detail in other passages: *pūgi phala samāyuktaṁ nāgavalli dalair yutam, karpūra cūrṇa saṁyuktam tāmbūlam pratigrihyatām.* I.e., "Mind to place before the idol for it to taste areca, with other ingredients usually mixed with it to give it more savor, i.e., a choice leaf of the white betel, and camphor mixed with lime."

From all this, one can see what great hardships would befall human life if all the things which these heathens use for their sacrifices were to be excluded from their social and civil mode of living. There is hardly anything normally used in their civil mode of living which is not requisitioned for the sacrifices of those idolaters. Nay more, the whole ritual procedure adopted at sacrificial functions has been taken from the court ceremonial of the kings and princes, as we read in the same *Āgama* a little after the beginning. Thus, the court servants bring their princely master water for bathing and cleansing his body from all impurity. Then they present him with clean clothing, flowers, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, jeweled rings, the *tilakam*, and similar ornaments. Next, after anointing his whole body with sandal mixture and various other scented substances, they provide him with aromatic powder; finally, they saddle his horse with housings and spread cushions on

the carriage seats for the master to ride out; they hold up an open parasol and do any other service that may be required. In the same way, consistent with the mentality of these heathens, their idols should be honored and served with all suitable devotion and care. The text of the Āgama runs thus: *sugandha lavaṅgādibhis tu snāyād rājopacaratalḥ rājavad eva piṭhadi samasthito hema kumbhakaiḥ.* I.e., "Just as it befits the dignity of a king to be seated on a splendid throne, to have water supplied to him in an exquisitely ornate vessel, to be decked out in a variety of fine apparel and invested with every kind of ornament, so it is of the utmost importance that the honor and sacrificial offerings presented to the god should be made up of everything that constitutes the royal trappings and court etiquette."

10.5. Conclusion

The thread, sandal, married state, etc., are all prescribed as social etiquette in sacrifices too. Just as these people deem it fitting to assign to the idol during the sacrifice every item of apparel and ornament that goes to the decking out of a king, so too they require that he who performs the sacrifice should, like a liveried lackey attending on a king, assume every social ornament which is in vogue among the members of his particular social class. In this nation no distinct set of clothing or ornament has been prescribed for the performance of sacrifice or worship, but each is bound to array himself for sacrificing with every social ornament proper to his class and grade. Therein lies the reason why, when he sacrifices, whoever has the title of doctor, retains on his forehead the particular mark of the doctorate which we have designated the *vidyāvardhanam.* Similarly, an uncultured man displays the frontal mark or *tilakam* that befits him. Whether he is a brahmin, or ruler, or merchant, or any other who habitually wears the caste thread, each retains his distinct thread also while performing his sacrificial function. This they consider it so important that if the thread chances to get torn while engaged in sacrifice, they do not proceed with it any further before they have either assumed another thread or tied up and restored the one that got broken. They do this not because there is a definite ruling forbidding the performing of the sacrifice without the thread, as though the wearing of the thread

were strictly connected with the performance of the sacrifice. After all, the pāṇḍārams and other plebeians sacrifice without the thread. But their reason is rather only that they regard a sacrificial act, and for that matter well nigh every other action, to be bereft of merit if it happens to be performed without that decorum and without those social ornaments which fit each person in keeping with his particular social class. As indeed those idolaters had a mind to compel their compatriots to perform the sacred functions with all decorum and with all the display of their social embellishments (given, as I said, that they have nothing by way of ornamentation and attire that is specifically sacred in character), they persuaded these people that those who performed religious functions with soiled and sordid clothes and mean personal appearance, or without that social distinction proper to their social standing, would deprive themselves of all merit.

This, then, is the common rule set down regarding the cleanliness and reverence which they wish to be observed in sacred rites. Just as they maintain that one of the conditions for gaining merit from the sacrifice consists in wearing the thread, even to the extent that if it were to get broken in the middle [of the sacrifice], for obtaining merit it was necessary either to assume another or to get the old one tied up again, so too they make it a condition for gaining the desired merit of sacrifice that they wear a linen cloth or garment, with the proviso that if it happened to slip off it should be put on again, at the pain of losing the merit of the action. For the same reason they insist on cleanliness in the clothing one wears, since by wearing dirty clothes one forfeits all merit. So too, it is prescribed that the body should be well washed and kept quite clean, since otherwise the penalty is loss of merit; and so on regarding similar matters. What is more, as these people consider it a great honor and a title to respect to be joined in marriage, while on the contrary to remain single is looked on as mean and shameful (unless perchance one pledges perfect continence and renunciation of all mundane things as the renunciants do), they set down as a rule that only a married man is authorized to offer sacrifice and that, should a he lose his wife by death while he is engaged in a sacrificial function, he should be barred from completing it unless

he first married another one. It is similar in other cases too. Finally, it also follows that when in certain sacrifices a particular mood, say of joy or of sadness or some other strong emotion of the soul is to be shown, because they do not put on a special dress to signify this, some alteration must be effected in one's habitual social attire and facial appearance. This happens, for instance, when one offers sacrifice for the dead. On such an occasion, as a manifestation of mourning, they wear the caste thread from the right shoulder across to the left side, whereas the common practice is to wear it from the left shoulder across to the right side. Moreover, they discard the upper covering which they wear as a sort of shawl over the front of their body, and keep the body bare from the waist up while the sacrifice lasts. Nor do they allow themselves any ornaments, nor anoint their forehead and body with fragrant oils or ointments. For all these things are manifestations of a cheerful and undistressful state of mind, dispositions that would ill suit the occasion.

10.6. Second Group: Things Used with Recitation

Under the second heading of misgivings, my critics bring forward the idea that our Christians should shun all actions such as are performed by the heathen to the accompaniment of a special rite and sectarian prayer, or are dominated by their conception of merit or demerit. My answer is to show, as before, that if this argument had any force, life would become impossible for our Christians.

In the first place, on the strength of that objection it would become illicit to sweep one's dwelling place, because these people, while cleaning up their houses, are wont to address to the gods this prayer formula found in the *Yajur* lawbook, Śākhā section, 3rd Aṣṭaka, 2nd Praśna, in the chapter that entitled *purodāśa*: *vasas tvā parigṛhṇantu gāyatreṇa chandasā, rudrās tvā parigṛhṇantu jāgatena chandasā*. I.e., "If they have a mind to favor the hymn in the *gāyatrī* meter, let the gods of the earth remove you hence (the invocation is to the earth); if they are pleased with our hymn in the *triṣṭubh* meter, let the gods with Rudra take you away from here; if they find delight in our hymn in the *jagati* meter, let the Āditya gods carry you off."

Second, it would be unlawful to sprinkle water on the floor either for sweeping, or to cool the room from the heat, or for any other reason, on the plea that in so doing they recite this prayer: *apavitraḥ pavitro vā sarvāvasthāṁ gato'pi vā yaḥ smaret puṇḍarīkākṣam sa bāhyabhyantaraś śuciḥ*. I.e., "Any man, whether clean or unclean, no matter how great and overwhelming his offenses and crimes may be, if he recalls to mind the god Viṣṇu, he will be free from the stain of sin, both within and without."

Add to this, third, that it would forbidden to shave off one's beard, because before doing this the people of this country address a prayer to the razor, as prescribed in the *Yajur* Lawbook,[117] 2nd Praśna: *triyāyuṣaṁ jamadagneḥ, kaśyapasya triyāyuṣam, yad devānāṁ triyāyuṣaṁ, tan me astu triyāyuṣam.* I.e., "May it be granted me to enjoy the long life of Jamadagni [he is the father of Viṣṇu Paraśurāma], and the long life of Kaśyapa [the son of Brahmā], and the long life of all the gods." That is followed by this invocation: "You are good, you are the daughter of the wife of Fire, I worship you, please do not harm me." Then, while the beard is being shaved off, after lathering the chin with warm water (cold water should not be used), it is directed in the same rule that they should recite the prayer which begins with the words: *uṣṇena vāyavodakenehi, aditiḥ keśān vapatu.* I.e., "O wind, please bring me warm water; Aditi (mother of the gods) please shave my head." I pass over the other invocations which they are wont to recite while shaving, lest I be too long. They may not, however, be omitted without a sin which can be expiated only by almsgiving.

Similarly, fourth, it would be illicit to scrape and clean the teeth, which the law prescribes is to be done by reciting the prayer beginning with the words *annādyāya brahmadhavam*, etc. I.e., addressing the twig they use for rubbing the teeth, "Be of service to me for eating, indispensable for a long life." Fifth, it would be equally wrong to rub the body with any fragrant oils or ointments, since the law bids them to do this while reciting at the same time the prayer which begins as follows: *namo grahāyaca*, etc. I.e.,

[117] Reading *Aduru* as *Yajur*.

"Reverence to the celestial planets, reverence to all the stars, reverence to all the gods."

Sixth, it would be necessary to abstain from the use of neckchains, earrings, jewels, red coral trinkets, and all such ornaments, because the same *Yajur* lawbook directs people to put them on while praying with an invocation which begins thus, *avāśo surome*, etc. I.e., "Please remain with me, do not speak with my enemies, grant me happiness."

Seventh, no one could lawfully encircle his head with wreaths, since that action too must be accompanied with the prayer beginning *śubhike śira āroha*, etc. I.e., "Ascend, wreath, upon my head, shed luster upon my face, grant that I may abound in goods." Eighth, the use of the mirror would also be forbidden, since that action also has its invocation recorded in the same law, with the words *mayi parvata puruṣam.* I.e., "Make me a man strong like a mountain, grant me a long life, make me illustrious and of outstanding fame." Ninth, the same condemnation would include the wearing of clothes and sandals, since their use depends on this prayer, *pratiṣṭhestho devanānām*, etc. I.e., "Preserve me in the manner of all the gods, do not cause me any annoyance."

Tenth, the same holds good for the use of an umbrella as protection against the sun. When carrying it, this invocation is prescribed, *prajāpateś śaraṇam asi*, etc., i.e., "You, abode of Brahmā, you who gives shade to mortal men, protect me." So too regarding a walking stick or anything to lean upon, for these, too, have an accompanying prayer, beginning with *mā hāsmahi.* I.e., "Do not desert me as I do not desert you; give me children; strike down my enemies; be my vehicle; be an affliction to my enemies."

It should be noted here that the stick referred to is not the stick carried by the renunciants or by men pledged to continence and renunciation from worldly things. Renunciants are not allowed to recite such prayers, as the Smṛti lawbook cautions them for the following reasons. First, because they do not direct their thoughts to any temporal good; second, they are not subjected to any sacred

and definite practice imposed by the law of the idolaters, but each is free to follow any way he deems to be the true one.

Again, if the contention of my critics holds good, no one could enter a house; for when he enters, he must recite the following prayer, *aditir dyaur aditiḥ*. See the first *Praśna* in the Āraṇya section. Nor could he leave the house without reciting the prayer, *pūsā tveno nayatu*, etc., as is prescribed in the first Praśna, second *kāṇḍa*, of the *Yajur* lawbook. Nor could he put money in his purse without the formula, *udbudhyasva agne*, as recorded in the *Saṁhitā*, second *Aṣṭaka*. Nor could he light a lamp without reciting *uddipyasva*, as stated in the sixth *Praśna* of the *Āraṇya* section, and neither could he extinguish it, for in doing so, he must say the common Tamil prayer, *iluvam koṇḍu poyi*, etc. Nor could he eat and drink; before drinking, there is this recitation, *samudraṁ vaḥ prahiṇomi*, etc. (Refer to the second Aṣṭaka of the *Yajur Veda*.) As for cooking food and eating it, so many sacrificial rites accompany this action that to enumerate them all would be a long business. Why add any more? Even to go to the toilet to discharge the bowels falls under a superstitious rubric recorded in the Āgama. To put everything in a nutshell: there is absolutely no action without its appropriate prayer. Hence the common Tamil proverb, *mantiram illāmal kirikai illai*, i.e., "There is no action without prayer."

If any action should have escaped notice, so that no precise prayer has been assigned to it in the lawbooks of the idolaters, there is a safe remedy in a common formula, applicable to everything, even the least action (and this formula, they insist, should never be omitted). It is crystallized in this brief form: *oṁ bhur bhuvaḥ svaḥ*.[118] This is said to purify every possible thing. Yes, I should say that with a view to compel the population of this country to observe a certain refinement of manner and respectable social customs, they contrived to persuade them that to neglect an honorable way of living was bound to bring sin and defilement

[118] A common Vedic and Upaniṣadic utterance of sacred sounds, often correlated with the parts of the world.

automatically upon them. Thus, to fail to sweep one's dwelling, to go about in dirty clothes, to spit in the presence of a superior, and so forth, all these things they regard as sinful. Similarly, it would be a grave transgression to eat dirt or drink urine or indulge in other filthy and unseemly practices. On the contrary, they say that great merit can be gained by sweeping one's home, by showing reverence to elders, by cleaning one's teeth, by cutting one's finger nails, by washing, by keeping away from filth, by adorning the forehead and the body, and by performing all other actions which in their opinion are becoming to a respectable and freeborn citizen. From this it is easy to infer what incalculable inconveniences would beset a man's life were he to give heed to the superstitious import with which the idolaters' laws have accidentally overlaid practices which of their nature are merely social practices, free from any religious implication.

10.7 Third Group: Things Dedicated to the Gods

I now come to the third class of objections which my critics bring forward, and on the strength of which they would have our Christian converts discard whatever the idolaters consider dedicated to various idols or symbolic of the gods. Again, I retort that if their argument had any force, then everything necessary to life would thereby be condemned. Thus, the argument could be adduced to discard from human consumption rice (the staple food of this country), because it is dedicated to the god Brahmā. Nay more, according to the idolaters of the school of the proponents of *māyā*, rice is identified with Brahmā, as stated in the 3rd Praśna of the Āraṇya lawbook: *brahmaṇe odanam*, i.e., "Rice is the god Brahmā."[119] In the Śākhā section, first Aṣṭaka, *pariṣṭhīvā eṣa yad odanam*, i.e., "This rice is Brahmā." Rice is also dedicated to the Vāsava gods, as stated in the same passage: *vasūnām vā etat rūpaṁ yat taṇḍulaḥ, vasūneva tat prīṇāti*. I.e., "Since rice is the very image of the Vāsava gods, the sacrificial offering consisting of rice is acceptable to the Vāsava gods." The same argument would also serve to condemn roasted rice, which the idolaters regard as the image of the sun, for thus the same law has it, *lājair juhoti*

[119] Literally, "Rice is for Brahmā."

ādityānāṁ vā etad rūpam: i.e., "Roasted rice is the effigy of the solar deities." (The proponents of *māyā* hold that the solar gods are twelve in number.)

On the strength of the same argument, honey too would have to be discarded from human consumption, because according to the idolaters honey is the symbol of those whom they regard as the superior gods. The reference is taken from the *Yajur* lawbook, Śākhā section, 1st Aṣṭaka: *madhunā juhoti mahatyai vā etad devatayai rūpam*. I.e., if you offer honey in sacrifice, you do a thing very pleasing to the higher gods, for honey is their likeness. By the same token, flour too, whatever be the kind of grain from which it is ground, would be forbidden since it is regarded as an emblem of the God Brahmā, just like rice. We are informed of this by the same source, *saktubhir juhoti prajāpater va etad rūpam*. I.e., "Flour is the figure of Brahmā." So too butter would be forbidden, because it is considered the seed of Brahmā, according to the *Yajur* lawbook, the Śākhā section, 3rd Aṣṭaka, in the following text: *prajāpater vā*, etc. Equally forbidden too would be gold, which is regarded as the effigy of the Fire god, in the same text, in the Āraṇya section, 3rd Praśnam: *āgneya hiraṇyam*. I.e., "Gold is the god of Fire."

Again, there would come under prohibition the use of every type of bodily ornament, such as flowers, perfumes, ointments, gems, and anything of the same sort people are wont to wear upon their persons, because it is recorded in the same book that these embellishments are the insignia of the Gāndarva gods (celestial songsters) and of those women that dwell in *svarga* (heaven). Here is the text: *gandharvāpsarabhyas srag alaṁkaraṇe*. I.e., "Whatever people wear to adorn their body is a figure of the Gāndarvas and the Apsaras." The same argument could be urged against wearing a white linen cloth because, in the opinion of the idolaters, this represents the moon, as stated in the Āraṇya section, 3rd Praśna.

So too one would have to oppose the use of the black linen cloth which represents the god Sannassuren[120] as is stated in the *Smārtam*,[121] and against the use of plaited mats which stand for all the gods, as the *Yajur Veda* has it in the 2nd Praśna. The argument could also be pressed against the use of the betel leaf which (as I have explained in 10.4) these people are constantly chewing and munching mixed with the areca nut and lime, because the first is sacred to Viṣṇu, the second to Brahmā, and the third to Rudra, as the following text has it: *kramuka brahmā tu*, etc. The use of a cot or bedstead would turn into a sinful act since they declare this to be a sign of *Manu*, a son of Brahmā, as we read in Āraṇya section, 3rd Praśna [of the *Yajur Veda*], under the formula *Manave talpam*. I.e., "The bed is sacred to *Manu*." It would likewise make it a superstitious practice to speak and write, because speech and letter writing, they opine, stand for the goddess Sarasvatī, as can be ascertained from the *Amarasiṁha*, where we find this text, *gir vāg vāṇi sarasvatī*. Again, the argument of these critics could be invoked as well in condemnation of the use of many domestic animals, such as the horse, the elephant, the bull, the cow, the mule, the goat, and the donkey, since all of these are regarded as sacred to various gods, while some of them are even considered to be gods.

In this Āraṇya section, 3rd Praśna, they also say this concerning the cow, *rudrāya gam*, i.e., "The cow (bull) is sacred to Rudra." Concerning the horse, *varuṇāya aśvam*, i.e., "The horse is sacred to Varuṇa;" concerning the goat, *tvaṣṭre ajam*, i.e., "The goat is sacred to the sun god;" concerning the mule and the donkey, *nirṛtaye aśvataragardabhau*, i.e., "The mule and the donkey are sacred to the demon *Niṛṛti*;" concerning the elephant, *himavato hastinam*, i.e., "The elephant is sacred to *Himavata*." Concerning the horse, there is another reference in that Śākhā section [of the Yajur Veda], 3rd Aṣṭaka, which reads, *prajāpater aśvaḥ*. I.e., "The horse is sacred to Brahmā." Concerning the pig, the following text is found in Āraṇya section, chapter 6: *uddhṛtāsi varāheṇa Kṛṣṇena*.

[120] Meaning uncertain.

[121] Perhaps a collection of traditional laws.

I.e., "The pig is Viṣṇu himself." Finally, if valid, the argument would make it compulsory for everyone to keep aloof from all the elements, and from himself as well, since each element represents a particular god, and man himself is said to be sacred to Brahmā. What I have to say about man is set down in the Āraṇya section [of the *Yajur Veda*], ch. 2. Regarding fire and water, these elements are declared to be the images of all the gods in the Śākhā section [of the *Yajur Veda*], chapter 3. Besides, fire is considered to be the third eye of Rudra, an assertion which finds a place in all the books. As for the air standing for the foot of Viṣṇu, this most commonly quoted saying is extracted from the *Amarasiṁha*.[122] Moreover, basing themselves on these conceptions, the idolaters conclude that anyone presenting any other man with any of these necessaries of life and commodities and the like, thereby gains much merit, because precisely these things are sacred and pleasing to the various gods mentioned above.

So, for instance, we find the gift of areca nut, betel leaf, and lime commended in the verse which begins with the words, *kramuka brahma tupyantu*; approbation of other gifts is found in other texts. As for the various rewards conferred by the gods on those donors for their bounties to their fellow men, there is a very long dissertation about them in the book that goes by the name of the *Mahāmāhātyma Purāṇam*.

10.8 It Would be Impossible to Live under Such a Universal Prohibition

So now, go right on and broaden your condemnation, so that it may be said that whatever is either used in heathen sacrifices, in accordance with their customs, or is otherwise contaminated by superstition, be it by a particular religious rite, a dedication, an invocation, or by mental implication, should all be set aside by those who profess Christianity. The inevitable consequence will then be that, as I said before, all of us who are in India shall find ourselves outside the pale of salvation. Understand, moreover and especially, how weak an argument they base themselves on in

[122] I.e., the dictionary attributed to Amarasiṁha.

condemning the brahmins' caste thread, i.e., on the ground that the first imposition of the thread is accompanied by certain superstitious invocations; how weak their contention is that the sandal mark is to be rejected, on the ground that sandal paste is impressed on the idol in the course of sacrifice; how weak is their contention that every other thing is banned, on the ground that it is regarded as sacred to some god. For while they condemn the use of the caste thread or of the sandal mark on such grounds, while they are willing enough to retain other practices, they adduce no stronger reasons in one case than in the other. If, on the contrary, they are determined to reject everything, then (as I said) it becomes absolutely impossible for Christians to live in India. For there is not a single thing, be its purpose to maintain human life or to serve as a sign of social distinction or to serve as bodily embellishment, either graciously bestowed on mortal man by Divine Providence or discovered by the ingenuity of mortal men, that is not made foul in India by an accursed superstition, through the artifice of the devil.

10.9. Two Guiding Rules Regarding Indian Customs

Hence, in my opinion, there are two rules to be observed in assessing the nature of India's customs. Both are based on the general tenets admitted by theologians as we find them in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part II.II, Question 3.

The first rule is that wherever in the customs of this country we find anything that has no relation to civil adornment, anything that does not serve as a sign of social distinction, anything that is not adapted to common human usage, but is exclusively oriented by idolaters towards the veneration and worship of an idol, such a thing can in no way be permitted to Christians. To this type must be assigned such practices as the so-called *nāmam*, the symbol of Viṣṇu, and the so-called *śobhacandanam*, the symbol of Kṛṣṇa, and other practices of the same ilk, unless perchance the Church has introduced some suitable alteration and transferred them to the field of Christian piety.

But if it is evident from other sources of information that a practice hails either from God with a view to the preservation of

life among men, or from human ingenuity in devising ways of common usage or civil distinction, such a practice need not give room for any scruple, no matter whether or not the followers of a particular sect have subsequently come to dedicate the same to their idol as a mark of their way of worshipping. Otherwise, we should deem it a duty to discard and reject from human use the very necessities of life, such as food, clothing, perfumes, etc.

The second rule is the following. If, in the aforesaid matters, i.e., in practices which of their own natural constitution or by popular convention have been established to meet either needs in the ordinary course of nature or the common needs of civilized life, the people here should adopt a line of conduct that is reprehensible, as for instance by overlaying some practice with incantations or rites of a superstitious character, or by associating it with some frivolous ideas of merit and demerit — then in that case, these practices are not to be condemned, as the theologians say, regarding their substance, but solely regarding the objectionable mode connected with it, and that offensive mode is surely to be discarded. Whoever in fact has ever said that it is forbidden to eat or drink, to sweep one's room, to look into a mirror, to contract a marriage, or for a king to array himself in royal state, etc., just because those idolaters have deformed them by their unseemly superstitions?

The reason underlying both these rules is none other than the one the theologians adduce in the text I indicated above: in the use of any object, we should keep an eye on the specific end inherent in it, either of its own nature or by man's assignment. For every human undertaking is governed by its end. Hence, if the whole substance of an action apart from any superimposed intention has an honest end, there is no reason why the action itself should be condemned and forbidden, Only the objectionable form, if any, is to be rejected.

10.10 How the Primitive Church Christianised the Pagan Way of Life

These principles are confirmed by the practice of the Church from the earliest times through long ages until today. Our ancestors in Europe did not abstain from the use of such things after receiving the faith of Christ, although we know full well that before their conversion such things had been defiled by superstitious modes of dedication or observances. Which of them ever abstained from marriage on the plea that the nuptial ceremony was thought to be presided over by the god of marriage? Whoever scrupled at observing virginity, on the grounds that they considered that calling to be heathen, under the patronage of Diana? Or was there ever anyone who renounced trading, on the ground that this profession was sacred to Mercury? What about sacral insignia and class distinctions? Was there ever anyone who objected to the wearing of the myrtle wreath at receptions for princes, or to the laurel wreath worn at processions in honor of victorious generals, on the ground that the first was sacred to Venus, and the latter to Mars? I pass over the garlands offered to poets, the scepters held by kings, the staffs of office of magistrates. As for dedications and consecration rites of various types intended for various purposes and various categories of beings, the world and all its parts (earth, sky, and sea), the elements, the fauna and flora, etc. — who can enumerate them all? Even over the work of their hands, articles of their own fabrication, down to the very walls of their houses, the lintels over the entrance gates, doors with their pivots and sockets — over all these they were foolish enough to set guardians, Jupiter of the threshold, Jupiter this, Jupiter that, Jupiter keeper of the doors and door hinges, keeper of the granary. Of course, when they started on some enterprise or some business, there were as many invocations and prayers as there were gods to whom these works were dedicated or who were supposed to preside over them. Many of these ritual prayers are found scattered about in the books of their scholars and in the poem of their poets.

10.11 Not All the Customs of the Ancients Were Rejected by Christianity

Did their descendants who became Christians reject wholesale all the practices and usages which the ancients in their moral blindness and foolishness had overlaid with unseemly and unprofitable superstitions? It must therefore be admitted by all that all such aberrations of mind matter little when the things concerned otherwise reveal an honest and legitimate purpose, either of their own nature and in their own right, or according to the law of nations. Finally, even supposing that the two rules I have indicated could not be applied without difficulty in some other countries (which surely cannot be the case), here in India they apply most certainly. About this there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. For in India, as I have pointed out previously, not all follow those sects, chiefly of the proponents of *māyā*, in which these vain beliefs are in honor. These observances are in vogue among the sects of the idolaters, particularly of the proponents of *māyā*. Indeed, those who adhere to the Buddhist teaching, and those who follow the wise, and those of other denominations, have neither any regard for, nor do they believe in, anything of the kind. But insofar as the caste insignia and practices of a purely social character or based on nature are concerned, they retain these in all sincerity and in their unpolluted form, and take care to transmit the same to their posterity.

10.12 Local Bishops can Modify the Objectionable Form of Some Indian Customs

Something, however, remains to be said about the second rule I have formulated. For these identical practices which have attached to them a mode or form that is reprehensible could also be very well cleared of this objectionable form, and then they could be taken up by our neophytes under a different and honest form sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority. They may, in a modified form or in some other way, be turned to the profit of Christian piety. Such a procedure would undoubtedly serve to give a greater impetus to the movement of the conversion of souls. Indeed, it is a truism that such a method is lucidly adopted both throughout the universal Church and by particular bishops in their particular

dioceses. In fact, this is the case regarding the introduction of new rites by bishops in their own churches, provided these rites did not come in conflict with the universal law of the Church. This method receives sufficient confirmation both in theory and in practice, not only from ancient usage, but also from the usage of more recent prelates. Consult Suarez,[123] Tome 3, Part 3, Disputation 15. As concerns the transference of heathen rites to Christian usage, I believe that the practice is confirmed by Baronius, among other authors, not once but in many successive passages in his writings, particularly in his *Anno Christi* 44, numbers 86-87, in *Anno Christi* 197, numbers 9 and 15, and *Anno Christi* 58, number 77. Among these customs are boys' wearing upon their necks cakes of wax stamped with the figure of a lamb called an *Agnus Dei*, the scattering of flowers and wreaths before the statues of the saints, holy water fonts or baptismal water receptacles at the entrance of shrines, money boxes for offerings placed at the entrance of shrines, and many other customs which it does not serve my purpose to list in detail.

10.13. Neophytes in India Should Not be Treated More Strictly Than Elsewhere

My contention stops at suggesting that it would prove very suitable and would serve the cause of converting souls to the Faith if some of the usages in vogue among the heathen with superstitious implications were purged of these implications and invested with some other overtones of a truly religious and sacred nature. It is very hard and extremely difficult, at least at the start, for our neophytes to leave off and reject at a moment's notice the habit of performing absolutely all human actions to the accompaniment of special rites or prayers. This, I candidly confess, is tantamount to climbing to the summit of a hill not by steps but by leaps and bounds, and that runs counter to ordinances issued to Abbot Mellitus by St. Gregory the Great, in Epistle 31 of Book 9, by St. Augustine in his letter to Faustus, Book 207, and in his letter 4 to Aurelius, by St. Jerome in Book 7 of *Against Vigilantius*, by

[123] Francisco Suarez, S.J. (1548-1617) was a prolific and influential Jesuit theologian.

St. Gregory of Nyssa in his life sketch of the miracle-worker (St. Gregory of Neo-Caesarea), by Theodoret, in Book 8 of *On the Truth of the Gospel*,[124] and by other saintly fathers of the Church. They were unanimous in deciding that great indulgence was to be shown to recent converts to Christ, that many practices which were gradually and in course of time to be eliminated should at first be tolerated, and that for the sake of suavity a good many could be transformed from superstitious ritual into sacred rites of a Christian tenor and complexion.

In truth, one cannot understand why India should be dealt with more strictly than the other countries where the Church was in its infancy and where men of a saintly character governed their Christian communities with such suavity and tolerance. Indeed, all the more gently should one proceed with this Indian nation, since to my knowledge converts here are subjected to many more and considerably greater difficulties than any other nation has ever undergone or is undergoing. This should be quite plain from what I have explained, and from what I shall explain further in the next chapter.

In this connection I must add one more consideration. Why, I ask, should these Indians show less religious devotion and piety towards Christ than they did towards false gods before their conversion? Since these people, prior to their conversion, were accustomed to recite certain distinct prayers suited to each single action — whether a matter of taking a walk, or eating, or drinking, or performing anything else according to purely civil use — why indeed, now that they have turned to Christ, should they be prevented from reciting certain prayers and invocations in perfect conformity with Christian piety? In this, to be sure, we find ourselves in perfect agreement with St. Augustine who, as noted above, proves it to be consistent with right reason that for the just honor and worship of the true God we should save from depraved usage those things which heathens unjustly consecrate to the cult of demons.

[124] Theodoret of Cyr (393-458) was a Syrian theologian and bishop.

10.14. Giving Firsthand Information to Indian Prelates Whom Goan Informers Misinformed

However, as I said, the whole of this question under deliberation is foreign to my purpose. Let those attend to it whom the most perfect and most high God has entrusted with the administration of the Church in India as their assigned and official task. My duty lay in this alone, that I should make clear whether or not certain customs and insignia are tainted with superstition. These are in vogue among these people here, and we find that the prohibition of them would render their conversion to Christ extremely difficult. Since, on the one hand, the books of the brahmins, which are written in Sanskrit and from which the full account concerning these customs and insignia is to be gathered, have up to now remained a closed secret to our men, since access to the brahmins' academies and assemblies has been denied them, since by the Divine Goodness both the Sanskrit language and all the Sanskrit texts, even those which are most inaccessible, and in particular those which treat of both civil and sacred laws, have been unfolded to me at this time, and since, , as is not less necessary, I have been allowed intercourse and fellowship with learned brahmins, a thing which up to now I did not enjoy — due to all these factors I am utterly convinced that I would be guilty of a grave offense in a matter of great importance if I failed to disclose the truth to my superiors and to the prelates in India.

I am fully aware of those neophytes who some time back informed the fathers of the Synod held at Goa about the brahmin caste thread, and perhaps also about some of the other matters I have dealt with thus far. But they have spoken in ignorance of the subject matter concerned. This can hardly be a surprise, since the so-called brahmins who reside at Goa and in the island of Salsette are mostly Koṅkaṇis, Komaṭṭis, Śivais, and the like — men who, as I said before (5.2), are not genuine brahmins. I.e., they are not members of that first order such as exclusively pursues learning and is versed in the books. Rather, they are merchants belonging to the third order of citizens, inferior in rank to the rulers and to the royal families. What wonder, then, that mere merchants dwelling along the sea coast, who have neither seen the lawbooks nor gotten

acquainted with the specific usages of the brahmins, should on no other basis than sheer personal opinion have suspected the brahmins' caste thread to be superstitious, possibly misled by witnessing some idolaters being invested with the thread for the first time to the accompaniment of superstitious prayers and rites! How weak and unreliable such an argument proves to be has been shown by all that I have explained thus far. Indeed, we have seen that among the adherents of the idolaters' sect here is absolutely nothing — be it ever so clearly of a social character, or perfectly indifferent, or by its nature good and honest — which they do not defile by overlaying it with some disreputable formality, i.e., by the use of various prayers or ceremonies. They use these at their first consumption of food, and for that matter at their meals each day, and in contracting marriage, dressing, taking a seat, and in every other action — none whatever excepted — which either the ordinary course of nature or the conventions of society have destined for the normal usage of men.

Chapter Eleven

The Necessity of Sanctioning the Ancestral Customs Prevalent in India insofar as they are Purely Social

11.1. Violations of Social Customs are Severely Punished

Great is the urgency of allowing the people of India to live according to the social traditions of their forefathers, particularly regarding the ancestral customs of those Indians who live inland, insofar as these are truly compatible with the Christian religion. Far greater indeed is the urgency here than in other parts of the terrestrial globe.

That bad habit common to all nations, to hold fast to their ancestral tradition, is a habit far more deeply rooted in the Indian nation because, confined as they have always been within their own boundaries without ever going abroad and getting to know the splendid civilization of other nations, they thoughtlessly hold the view that they far surpass other mortal men by the refinement and excellence of their cultural habits. In addition, there is also this singular trait or characteristic, I might say, of this nation among all the other nations, i.e., that they inflict the severest penalties on those who reject the ancestral customs or mere social conventions, as I have indicated at the end of Chapter One of this report.

In India, apart from the distinct profession its members exercise, each social class boasts its own distinct insignia, its own manner of dress, its own distinct usages and society manners, which they are bound to observe on pain of losing their social grade. This is well known from common practice, and is moreover enjoined in the *Laws of Manu*, in the verse beginning with the words, *śilpena vivahāreṇa* (3.64), and in many other texts. Among Indians the loss of one's social grade is considered as the worst of evils. Many would willingly undergo death to redeem it, and not infrequently

they do! For as soon as anyone is degraded from the order of his clan he becomes an outcast, deprived of all honor and hereditary dignity, thrown out from any meeting held by members of his grade, scornfully denied any fellowship with his social equals and kinsfolk, and separated from intercourse and companionship with his own family members.

11.2. The Higher the Caste the Severer are the Sanctions

Although this law is common to all of the grades and social orders listed in the same Chapter One, yet it is applied with far greater severity with respect to the three orders deemed to constitute the aristocracy: the brahmins, the rulers, and the merchants. Hence, with reference to them the same legislator, *Manu*, lays down this particular rule: *sadbhir ācaritam yat syāt dharmikaiśca dvijātibhiḥ, tad deśakulajātīnām aviruddham prakalpayet* (*Manu*, 8.46). I.e., "In regard of the customs which are transmitted by forefathers, as it were by hand, and which in every region are wont to be retained by the three noble clans called the twice-born, let the kings watch with utmost care lest anything repugnant to them be introduced." In Chapter Eight, in the paragraph which begins with the words, "Indeed, it is clearly indicated,"[125] we have seen that under the denomination "twice-born" are included only brahmins, rulers, and merchants, who form the three noble clans.

Moreover, in the case of brahmins, the law punishes an offender with yet far greater rigor, and precisely on that account it is impossible in this interior part of India which is governed by heathen kings, short of an unheard of divine miracle, for a brahmin to embrace the Faith, unless he be allowed the use of his caste thread and of other cultural and social observances. As soon as a brahmin rejects the thread, the tuft of hair, and similar caste distinctions which, as I have said, are purely social manners, he not only ceases to be regarded a brahmin, but has to face very severe penalties. He will either have his eyes gouged out, or he will be subjected to some public ignominy which they generally dread even more than the loss

[125] See Chapter 8, section 8.1.

of their eyesight. I.e., the delinquent, marked with the stigma of lifelong infamy, is banished from all social intercourse to such a degree of barbarity and cruelty that not even his parents will be allowed to approach him under pain of incurring the same penalty. Nor is there any hope of recovering later on either the dignity of their class or their standing in the community. By the king's order their goods and property will be seized and allocated to the public use, to the extent of not leaving them even so much as a loin cloth to cover themselves.

Hence, even should a pagan brahmin of inland India summon up fortitude enough to bear for Christ's sake a perpetual exile from his parents and his fellow citizens and perpetual infamy and destitution, and even should he not hesitate to betake himself to the towns occupied by the Portuguese with a view to embrace the faith, even in those towns he would have to be supplied with the necessities of life, meals, and clothing, seeing that most brahmins are incapable of earning a living by manual labor. Such an alternative does not appear to be practicable.

11.3. Necessity of Converting the Brahmins to Evangelize the Other Castes

However that may be, the necessity of allowing the brahmins the use of their caste thread and other merely social practices may be gathered from yet another consideration. In these interior parts of India, if you exclude brahmins, then by doing so all the other classes of citizens are mostly kept out. Several reasons account for this situation. First, in India the brahmins, because of their highest nobility, exercise supreme authority and set the example for all others, so that all follow their example without any further inquiry. Second, since in India the brahmins alone represent the intellectuals and the teaching profession, from the earliest times it became an established custom for just about everyone from the inferior orders, before attempting anything, particularly in matters connected with the sciences and the religious sects, to take counsel on the subject from some learned brahmin. It is from this popular attitude that emerges our greatest and most frequently encountered obstacle in

the way of the conversion of these heathen. We feel this in our religious community. Almost all of those to whom we propound the catechetical teaching of Christ immediately go to consult the brahmins or bring them along to our house, since they themselves are conscious of their ignorance in such matters. They do this so that they may learn what their wise men have to say in rebuttal. Thus, well versed in logic and philosophy as these brahmins are, at once they lead the minds of the inquirers astray by their complicated and abstruse arguments.

11.4. All Our Difficulty Comes from Want of Adaptation

Moreover, regarding our striving to win these people over to Christ, it is from this source, i.e., from the changeover of these people from their own distinct usages, that our difficulty, indeed a formidable difficulty, mainly springs. When these heathen see that our Christian neophytes discard the caste thread and many other time-honored practices of their own culture, and adopt the manner of foreigners, they come to think that those who apply to us for spiritual instruction change not so much their religious beliefs and practices as the very tenor of their civil grade. Therefore, they look upon them as degenerates, in reality cut off from their former grade and consequently, as I have said, deprived of every civil advantage. This is so true that many heathen who have noticed our way of acting in other Christian communities in India have often come to complain at our residence, loudly declaring that they could not understand why we made it a strict condition for following the law of Christ that one should lower one's civil status and deny oneself all human dignity and every human benefit.

Doubtless, in places subject to Portuguese dominion, the inconveniences which this change in cultural manners entails may perhaps not be so formidable, since there neophytes may be defended and protected by the Portuguese governors. But the situation is quite different in these inland regions of India entirely under the sway of heathen kings. Here no one can abandon the established social manners of his particular clan unless he is

prepared, as I have said, thereby to forfeit — both for himself and for his children together — not only his former high social standing, but absolutely every kind of human support towards the preservation of life.

11.5. Indians Expect Foreign High Castes to Behave Here as Indian High Castes

Before concluding, I make one more remark under this head, a remark no less indispensable in view of the conversion of these inland Indians. The herald of the Gospel must himself, as far as possible, conform his way of acting to the social customs of these people. Otherwise, he will not be regarded by these people as either a true-born gentleman or as one worthy to move and live among them, much less as one from whom they may learn the teaching of salvation. Experience goes to prove this sufficiently and more than sufficiently. Often used and abused among these people is the familiar saying that the propriety of social behavior varies with the accepted customs of various regions, and that it is the part of a prudent man to conform his way of acting, within the frame of his genetic group and the civil grade to which he belongs, to the corresponding usages of the region where he takes up his abode. The same rule is found in the *Laws of Manu*: *yasmin deśe ya ācāraḥ paramparya kramāgataḥ, varṇānām sāntarāḷānāṁ sa sad ācāra ucyate*. I.e., "A man acts prudently and appropriately when, in the region where he lives, when he adapts himself to the ancestral manners retained there by the men of his own class, whether they represent the highest order, or the middle class of society." Of the same import is another proverbial saying, *deśācāraḥ kuladharmaḥ* . I.e., "The established social custom of each region is equivalent to the corresponding custom of one's clan of origin."

From this the people here naturally conclude that everyone whosoever should be disposed not only to adopt the manners of the country where he lives, but also to consider these as his very own and thus, so to speak, as hereditary and inborn. Hence, regarding

that text quoted above,[126] *sadbhir ācaritam*, (*Manu* 8.46), etc., in which *Manu* bids the king to beware of permitting anything that goes counter to the customs of the nobility, the commentator on *Manu* forthwith observes that this ruling is to be understood in conformity with the customs of the region, so that (as he says) immigrants in foreign lands are not to abide by the usages of their country of origin unless these correspond with those of the inhabitants of that place.

On the strength of this general opinion and of the *Laws of Manu*, these people almost necessarily conclude that a foreigner who does not adopt the manners observed by the members of the nobility in their own society is not of noble birth and of high rank, and that, on that score, he is not entitled to free intercourse with them. They believe that anyone who has held the rank of professor and learned man in his own home country would certainly and without hesitation behave in society in society here like the learned men of this country, and that anyone who claims descent from a royal family of some other land would likewise follow the style and manner of acting of kings here, and similarly regarding persons belonging to other grades of nobility. Were he to act differently, these people would naturally be inclined to conclude that his family is one of those plebeian families of the West, which they know to differ both in social standing and in social customs one from the other.

11.6. We May be Despised for Christ but Not for Violating Rules of Caste

Now if this attitude [of disregard] sprang from a dislike for the religion of Christ, or if it were confined within the limits of an adverse opinion, it could no doubt be put up with. To be despised and to be looked down upon as of low birth, for Christ's sake, is for the preacher of the Gospel the highest title of nobility. But this is not the case. For one thing, if we are an object of contempt, it is not by reason of our religion, but solely (as I have said) by reason of the

[126] In 11.2.

social conventions (which we reject). For another thing, this contemptuous attitude is not limited to mere mental disapproval, but it reaches so great an extreme that the heathen are scared and turn away from the Christian teaching, while our neophytes are subjected to cruel persecution and involved in inextricable difficulties. All this is, as I said, to no purpose nor to any advantage, since it has no relation whatever to the faith. Nor do these people understand how anyone can take lessons in right living from a man of low birth, without by that very fact sinking to the low level of social manners and to the mean social standing belonging to that same teacher.

Which man, then, will be induced at such a price to put on the livery of social degradation and contemptible social status? Conversely, who will deny that it is one's first duty of charity, in view of the salvation of souls, to set aside that tenor of life into which one was born, second nature though it may have become to him, and to assume a different one, if this new way of acting is purely of a social character and entirely free from any moral blame? Indeed, who does not know that such a course of action has a sweet force of attraction and has often been adopted by saintly men in cases of less urgency than ours here? To make oneself all to all (in social matters) has from earliest times been the policy of the apostles of the Christian faith. Christ himself, the guide and master of the apostles, did not deem it below his august dignity to move freely with those he came to save, and even to comport himself in their company with such familiarity that on this score he was adversely criticized by the Pharisees and leaders of the people.

11.7. Alexander's Example of Adaptation

In this matter that interests us from a religious viewpoint, let me be allowed to draw an analogy from a secular precedent. What Alexander had to say in connection with the subduing of nations conquered by force of arms is well-known. He maintained that what most effectively ensured the control of the nations thus conquered was the willing cooperation of a population won over by means of a mutual interchange of social habits. Indeed, I am convinced that the spiritual conquest which is our objective must be achieved in much

the same way as that political conquest (which was the objective of that conqueror). Just as the overlord of city-states must (to ensure his sway) adopt many of the local institutions, so too must the ecclesiastical leaders set over the Christian communities. Just as the proper government of nations depends on a policy of give and take, so too the pastoral care of souls in view of heaven must (to use Alexander's words) comprise two things: we must give them certain advantages, and must also learn certain lessons from them. In other words, we must learn and tolerate their human ways of acting in society, so that in turn we may teach and strengthen in them the ways of God.

11.8. General Approves our Method

Therefore our Rev. Father General, on being duly informed of the social structure of this nation, realized clearly the problem that the state of affairs in India presents, a problem by no means easier, but rather much more complicated than that which confronts our Companions in the Chinese empire. He has therefore been pleased, both on several occasions in previous years and particularly last year, to praise our way of acting and to direct that we should conform ourselves to the ancestral usages of this nation regarding food and clothing and other social practices, insofar as it is necessary, and insofar as a sincere zeal for religion and Christian perfection allows. This connection is necessary lest these poor people, who are withheld from entering upon the way of salvation by ordinary reasons and, in particular, by reasons based in their own religion which by themselves constitute a very serious deterrent, should in addition be further frightened away by this other reason which is of a social character and injurious to their normal mode of life.

By following this method of adaptation we certainly seem to bring about the desired result. People of every class approach us and listen without fear to the teaching of the Faith. Members of royal families and men who hold a high position in the state, and, what is more, brahmins too, well versed in Law and philosophy, do not hesitate to pay us that reverence which befits our calling. Moreover,

not a few persons of whatever social rank they may belong, brahmins included, come to us not only to discuss religious matters, but also become convinced of the truth of our religion and embrace the faith in Christ.

May the infinite goodness and mercy of God vouchsafe for his greater honor and glory to bless this undertaking with solid and lasting fruit. Praise be to God and to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary!

Roberto de Nobili

Appendix One

Judgment of 108 Brahmins with the Degree of Doctor in their Several Branches of Learning

On Certain Customs Prevalent in India

This treatise has been reduced to eight statements about which 108 doctors testify. As in every inquiry, particularly when the subject of inquiry is concerned with a people's customs and conventional obligations freely contracted, it is of great importance, apart from the written authority of books on the subject, to ascertain the general consensus of learned men actually living. Therefore I have deemed it my duty, after providing a copious store of information from written records treating of certain Indian usages, to investigate also what those men among the brahmins who boast the title of "doctor" think about them. My purpose in doing so is to free our superiors and the prelates of the Church in India from every vestige of doubt in a matter which is theirs to decide. Embracing, therefore, the whole subject-matter under eight propositions, I submitted these propositions to the various conferences of brahmin doctors found this town (Madurai), for favor of their judgment concerning them, freely given by each of them. After going through these propositions these men wrote out individually what each of them thought about them and signed his attestation in his own hand. I shall here transcribe a copy of those attestations among with the

said propositions. The autographs themselves, written on Indian palm leaves, I keep by me, so that should the need arise, I may confront their authors with them and have them confirmed and reaffirmed.

These Doctors Come from All Parts of India

Now the brahmins who have subscribed to these eight propositions are not restricted to one town or province, but hail from different Indian kingdoms. They have come to this town, one of the most frequented in India, to secure for themselves either renown by reason of eminence in letters, or financial profit. From this you will realize that the judgment passed on the said propositions does not represent the verdict of a single state, but the consensus of the whole of India. The brahmin doctors who have actually subscribed to the document, however, are one hundred and eight in number — not because there are no more (for all of them would have subscribed to it without hesitation), but because I deemed this number to be sufficient for anyone to conclude as to what the whole brahmin clan thinks about the matter in question. Furthermore, those who have written in Grantha characters are Tamil brahmins, i.e., brahmins of south India, while those who have used the Badaga [Telegu] script are brahmins of north India, since these are accustomed to render Sanskrit texts in the Badaga script. But since both groups speak Sanskrit, for easier reading and understanding I shall transcribe their attestations in the Grantha script. Again, as for the titles *batulu* and *avdhāni* which are customary among north Indian brahmins, they denote the same thing as the title *śāstri* used by southerners. All three appellations indicate a doctor, whether the title is based on actual teaching (the third and highest claim), or on a perfect mastery of a science (the second claim), or simply on graduating (the first step). Some, however, from a sense of modesty, have abstained from adding the title of doctor to their name in any form, though they also are truly doctors like the others.

They Gave it Freely, Though They are Neither Christians nor Friends

Finally, I should like to make the following clear to all my readers. First, these doctors, whose attestations are transcribed in this document, are neither Christians nor catechumens, nor in any way bound to us by the bonds of friendship or familiar intercourse. All of them are non-Christians and outsiders. Second, not a single one of them has received either from me or anyone else either money or any other gift. Indeed, I declare and bear witness in all truth and sincerity that in conducting this inquiry, throughout it all, not so much as one *as* (copper coin) has been spent by anyone. So then, it should be quite clear that these men have not been influenced by any inducement, favor, gift, or hope of reward. Rather, in giving their testimony, insofar as each one's personal knowledge of the facts of the case suggested to each one, they were prompted by no motive other than the truth alone.

Eight Propositions Which Summarize the Treatise

First proposition: *na bhavanti brāhmaṇāḥ devalakāḥ yo devalakas so 'pi niṣiddhas śūdrasama iti* Brahmins are not managers of temples nor are they priests. If anyone discharges the office of priest, that one is of low birth and equal to a plebeian.

Second proposition: *sarvalokātiśayajñānino brāhmaṇāḥ te sakalavedaśāstrādhyayanādhyāpakayogyāḥ.* The brahmins are the world's wise men, inasmuch as their appropriate and distinct office consists in both learning and teaching all the laws and all the sciences.

Third proposition: *bhuvane vidyamāna vedāṁś ca tarkaśāstraṁ ca śabdaśāstraṁ ca jyotiḥ śāstraṁ ca laukikādhyātmikaśāstraṁ ca kāvyaṁ ca vidyāviṣayagirvāṇiṁ ca paṭhituṁ ca pātrāḥ bhavanti teśāṁ asādhāraṇalakṣaṇam idam* All the laws and sciences, however many may be found among men — e.g., logic, philosophy, the science of words, mathematics, the science which treats of the world and of God, as well as poetry and the teaching of Sanskrit (i.e., the language in which the sciences are written) — all these subjects, I

say, fall within the ambit of the office of studying and teaching which the brahmins take upon themselves. This is the proper definition of brahmins.

Fourth proposition: *brāhmaṇeṣu yas tādṛśo na bhavati so vyāja brāhmaṇa eva ātmavaṁśavṛttiparityāgāt* Any brahmin who fails to remain engaged in these pursuits is a brahmin only in a questionable sense, since he acts inconsistently and in a manner contrary to his inborn calling.

Fifth proposition: *yajñaḥ brāhmaṇakṣatriyavaiśyaiḥ kartuṁ śakyate vedasmṛtivacanāt* As for sacrifices (the so-called *yajñaḥ*): brahmins, rājas, and noble merchants are all entitled to perform them, as the law and Smṛti clearly show.

Sixth proposition: *brāhmaṇotkṛṣṭamaḥ jātividyādhikāritvayoḥ yajñopavitaṁ sākṣāllakṣaṇaṁ syāt* The thread worn by the brahmin caste is nothing but a distinct badge of the noblest clan and, of course, of the official power of imparting wisdom.

Seventh proposition: *yogālaṁkārārthaṁ ca alakṣmiparihārārthaṁ ca candanādayaś sadādhāryāḥ kasyāpi matasya ca devasya ca lakṣaṇam na syāt alaṁkāralakṣaṇasya vidyamānatvāt yogyalaukikālaṁkāraparaṇa dhāryam bhūṣaṇeṣu uttamaśṛṇgāraṁ tilakam iti* Sandal, musk, and such things cannot be said to be the emblems of some particular god or sect. Rather, they have been introduced for the sole purpose of decent adornment and the removal of unsightliness. Since they have for their object the display of refinement in bodily appearance, they may legitimately be used by anyone who delights in social stylishness. Chief among these embellishments ranks the frontal beauty mark which they call the *tilakam.*

Eighth proposition: *vidyāyāḥ lakṣaṇaṁ caturaśraṁ syāt jñāninā ca saṁnyāsinā cādhyātmikena ca nānāvidha vaidikaiś ca sadā dhāryam* The square-shaped figure drawn on the forehead is the symbol of learning. Therefore, it is particularly fitting for learned

men and renunciants (i.e., such men as lead a chaste life, since the people here want such men to be well educated). It also looks well on those who are well-versed in theology and all such men who profess various branches of law and other sciences.[127]

Appendix Two

The Letter of Archbishop Francis Ros of Cranganore

I, Francis Ros, archbishop of Cranganore, have gone through this memorandum entitled the *Report concerning certain usages prevalent in the Indian nation* by Father Robert de Nobili of the Society of Jesus. I have given it for perusal to the Rev. Father Rector of the College in Cranganore (Christopher de Abreu) who read it through carefully, weighing every statement. The conclusion is that there is not only no evidence to show that anything contained in the memorandum is contrary either to the Faith or to sound morals, but that, on the contrary, it proves completely, with profound erudition and on the strongest authority, that the use of the caste thread, the *kuṭumi*, and the sandal paste, does not, as far as their nature is concerned, have any taint of superstition, no more than marriage or other social practices common among these people. It also demonstrates that the brahmins, as the authority of our writers has always supported too, are in virtue of the distinct calling of their clan purely a class of learned men, not a priestly class. As for the rest, i.e., the wearing of the caste-thread and other practices, it proves them to be no more than cultural or social customs to such good purpose that there is not the slightest reason left to doubt or argue about this.

Therefore, wishing to see the laborers in this vineyard all of one mind, bearing the day's burden and its heat with more abundant

[127] De Nobili appends here a list of the names of the 108 brahmins.

fruit, I am of the opinion that the superiors of the Society should approve this memorandum of forty leaves of writing. They should have it printed, so that all may come to know for certain that they may conform themselves to the ways of the Gentiles with respect to these usages. To go easy on the subject of these usages, to be accommodating and conciliatory, is indubitably licit and necessary in these realms, as experience has taught us. By contrast, to repudiate this adaptation and kind concession in cultural matters would inevitably (morally speaking) result in the impossibility for anyone here to approach a preacher of the Gospel for instruction or to be converted to the faith.

Francis, Archbishop of Cranganore
December 24, 1615

2
The Dialogue on Eternal Life

The First Dialogue

I.1 The Need for Knowledge of God

[1][1] **Master:** There is one almighty Lord who exists due simply to himself, who is the cause due to whom everything else exists, and who is responsible for the destruction of everything that is to pass away. He deserves to be worshipped by all people. He is all-pervasive and all-knowing. He records people's merits and demerits, and accordingly grants blessings and punishments.

After praising him in thought, word and deed, we wish to explain succinctly to you the knowledge which one must learn and which, coming in the form of light, removes the ignorance that lies in the mind in the form of darkness.[2] Since we shall throw light on eternal life by answering the questions you raise, this book is called "The Dialogue on Eternal Life." For "dialogue" means "raising questions and answering them." This is a dialogue "on eternal life," since we are inquiring together into liberation which is eternal life.

Disciple: Your servant desires this kind of help, and therefore I approach you. I wish to hear this kind of dialogue on wisdom frequently. But when you wish to explain to me wisdom and the purpose of knowing wisdom, why explain it only succinctly? Please tell me.

Master: Knowledge does not here mean what people usually mean, i.e., "Knowing various things." Rather, this knowledge investigates that Reality which is both immanent and transcendent[3]

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1 We have included the page numbers from Fr. Rajamanickam's Tamil edition, to aid those who wish to consult the original.

2 I.e., as blindness.

3 *parāparavastu*. The supreme reality is a *vastu*, i.e., it is objective, real, substantial. It is also "immanent and transcendent" (*para-apara*), both beyond human capacity and yet present everywhere in the world. The term

and has the form of knowledge; it is a knowledge which points out the meritorious means of reaching liberation.

Disciple: You spoke about knowledge and the benefit which results from it. You must explain this kind of knowledge to me briefly.

[2] Master: It is said that this knowledge which is wisdom[4] has no limits. If it were to be explained in great detail, many people would not understand it, for several reasons. Some are entangled (in their own attachments) due to their embodied nature. Some are not capable of spending a long time in studies, since they are involved in worldly concerns.[5] Some, due to poverty, are unable to make the effort to enter studies. Some are averse to knowledge because of hindrances such as illness. One must therefore express a vast body of knowledge succinctly, so that all might gain it. Moreover, one should start learning from youth, but immature people are not fit for knowledge that is given in all its details. So what must be known should be made easy.

Disciple: Liberation is a blessing for all time, and that is the purpose of knowledge. What (knowledge) will enable the soul to attain this blessing?

Master: One has to know the Veda of the Lord — but also act accordingly. It is as if someone knows the way to reach a city but,

parāparavastu is found in the some Hindu Śaiva texts, such as the *Civañānacittiyār* by Aruḷnanti, which de Nobili quotes in the *Report on Indian Customs*.. Interestingly, *parāparavastu* is also the most common word for God as the highest reality in the *Genealogy of the South-Indian Gods*, an early 18th century work by the influential Protestant missionary Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, who uses it to indicate a transcendent Godhead which is prior to specific Hindu deities. See Tiliander, 125-132, who cites Fabricius' Tamil dictionary: "Parāparam is analysed as *para - apara*: 'remote' and 'not-remote.' That gives to *Parāparaṟ* the meaning of God as being at the same time transcendent and immanent, beyond reach and yet approachable, hidden and yet revealed." (127-8)

4 In this sentence de Nobili uses two words which might be translated as "knowledge:" *jñānam* ("knowledge") and *vidyā* ("wisdom").

5 For comparison, see *Summa contra Gentiles* I.4 and *Summa Theologiae* I.1.1

because he does not take that way, he never reaches that city. So too, if one knows the Lord's Veda but does not act accordingly, he will not reach liberation.

I.2 The Nature of Revelation and the True Veda

Disciple: What is this "Veda"?[6]

Master: The true statements spoken by the Lord in various ways are said to be "Vedic utterances." Thus the Lord revealed different truths to different great persons with the intention of saving the world. Thus the Lord himself wrote the Veda using their tongues as pens, so these great persons did not teach merely according to their own right thinking.

[3] Disciple: You say that "Veda" means "the truths revealed by the Lord." But some say that "Veda" means "words spoken by trustworthy people."[7] Could these two be the same?

Master: To say that Veda is "words spoken by trustworthy people" is the same as saying that the Veda is "that which is spoken by the Lord." A trustworthy person speaks what is true and good; since the Lord is all good and by nature true, he alone can be called the trustworthy one. Apart from the Lord, nothing created is essentially true, since through ignorance and self-reliance these can go astray. Since (what is created) is not entirely good by nature, there could be in their words statements which do not intend what is good. So the term "trustworthy one" can be applied to the Lord

6 "Veda" can refer to divine revelation or to the specific expression of that revelation is a sacred text, scripture. Throughout we retain the term "Veda" except if it is very clear that it is only a more general sense of revelation that is intended.

7 *āptavākyam*. Unlike some other Hindu systems, Nyāya logic traces the authority of scripture to the speech of trustworthy and competent persons, the apta. That the Veda is "words spoken by trustworthy people" — or a supremely trustworthy person — is a standard definition in the Hindu school of Logic, Nyāya. Words, even sacred words, are reliable because of the reliability of their speaker. Other Indian systems, most notably the Mīmāṁsā (ritual) theology and Vedānta theology, insist that the Veda is perfect knowledge because it is pure speech, not dependent on an author at all.

alone. Since the Lord is at all times trustworthy, the view that the Veda is "an utterance by a trustworthy one" is the same as saying "the Veda is spoken by the Lord."

Disciple: What then is the meaning of "Veda"?

Master: The meaning of the word "Veda" is "that speech which makes known righteousness and unrighteousness."[8]

Disciple: What would be wrong were one to maintain that there is no Veda, no word spoken by the Lord, anywhere in the world?

I.3 The Moral Purpose of Revelation

Master: The revealed word of the Lord came to be called "Veda" since it teaches by making known righteousness and by showing and setting aside what is sinful. There must be a Veda in the world in some form or another, and it must remain as an authority and solid support for right behavior, according to the ability of each person. **[4]** Thus, a king who is intent on justice and who protects all the people of his country should teach every deed of justice and should create interest in righteousness by promising, "I will reward those who walk in the way of righteousness." Moreover, he should also warn people by saying, "I will punish sinners," so that they avoid sinful deeds and do not even think of such deeds. So too, the Lord, who is the maker of the world and entirely just, who protects all the people of the world, should reveal what is virtuous. He should graciously promise, "I will reward virtuous people," so that their minds are turned toward virtue. Besides this, he must show what sin is, so that they can avoid it, and he should make their minds turn from sin by threatening, "I will punish those who commit sins," so that no one will commit those sins.

Seen from the viewpoint of righteousness as a whole, devotion to God is the highest righteousness; it is the greatest of all sins to say that there is another greater than (the Lord) and to worship

[8] *Dharma* ("righteousness") is the right order of reality, cosmic, natural and moral, similar to the natural law; *adharma* ("unrighteousness") is the opposite and includes immoral behavior.

such a god, instead of teaching devotion (to the Lord). Such a major sin, and other sins too, must be removed. People must be taught to know the Lord as he is, since it is not possible to be devoted to the Lord and worship him if his real nature is not known. That is why one should say that there must be a Veda in the world, i.e., "a word spoken by the Lord."

Moreover, a father looks after his family in his household, providing the food, clothing, etc., that are needed for the body. The wise father leads the family on the path of righteousness by giving them right understanding of various things. Similarly, the Lord creates the world and all the people in the world so that, in a way, he is father to the world. He protects his family by giving food, clothing, etc. Moreover, he enlightens them as to what is righteous and what is sin, so as to guide them on the path of righteousness. Thus, he looks after them (in all these ways). **[5]** Therefore, it must be said that there is a Veda in the world, in some form or another, understanding "Veda" as the word spoken by such a father, the Lord.

It must also be said that the Lord, who by nature is himself knowledge is also the cause of all understanding and wisdom. Since the Lord is the cause for human knowledge, it must be accepted that the Lord himself is the teacher of humanity. As teacher, he must teach the people who are his disciples about truths learned from various perspectives,[9] in order to explain the necessary moral laws related to justice.[10] The truths taught by the Lord in this way must be called the "Veda." Finally, the Lord created human beings as endowed with intelligence, so they could be free. It must also be noted that the Lord grants favor and sufficient strength to people so that they can reach their destiny (liberation), Otherwise, it might be said that the Lord teaches people in vain about this state — like teaching birds to fly when they do not have wings.

[9] I.e., according to different *darśanas*, philosophical or (more properly) theological and religious systems of thought.

[10] "Moral laws," *dharma* and "justice," *nitidharma*.

Therefore, the Lord intended that reasonable people should reach the state of freedom as they walk in the way of righteousness by knowing him, by being devoted to him, and by turning against sin. People should reach a state of liberation by knowing, through the Veda those hidden truths which cannot be known by human beings alone, and then, according to God's intention, by following the path of the Lord himself and thus reaching that goal which is liberation.

From all these arguments which we have given, therefore, and by various other reasons too, one must conclude that there is indeed in the world a Veda spoken by the Lord. To deny this surely would be a great sin.

I.4 Revelation in Relation to Natural Knowledge of God

[6] Disciple: What you have explained in this way has become very clear to me. But still there is one more doubt, and this too must be cleared up by your gracious explanation, as the sun's rays dispel the darkness.

Master: Tell me all the doubts in your mind without hesitation. If a sick person hides his illness and does not tell his physician, the illness increases. So too, when a disciple hides his doubts from his teacher, ignorance will increasingly cover the faculty of understanding in his soul. For ignorance is the cause of all that you call "doubts."

Disciple: The Lord gave intelligence to human beings so that they could discern and come to know what is righteous and unrighteous, the true and the false. Along with this, he has also given us the mind with its freedom. As a result, people are capable of avoiding sin and doing good. If so, it seems that there is no need for the Lord to favor us by granting us the Veda, which makes known what is righteous and unrighteous, the true and the false.

I.5 . The Hierarchy of Truths

Master: In the process of knowing certain truths, a procedure is needed. I.e., after knowing one particular truth, something else is

which is to be known can also be learned. Knowing one truth more deeply becomes the means to knowing other truths. One has to ascend gradually in knowledge, for learning is like climbing a ladder. That is, without mounting the first rung, the second rung cannot be reached; after stepping on the second, then one can reach the third. It is by mounting the lower steps first that one reaches the higher steps. Similarly, different truths are like successive steps on the ladder of learning. One has to learn (the basic) truths first, and thereafter come to an understanding of the higher truths that are to be learned.[11]

[7] The point is that in order to clear up the doubt you are now raising, some other truths have to be understood first. If you know them they will serve as a light to illumine the truth about which you are inquiring. Befitting this context then, I will explain to you the truths that are to be learned first. I will remove your doubt by summarizing all the truths I have explained up to now.

An intelligent being will act only after deliberating on the purpose of the action.[12] Thus, for example, one who builds a house does this to make a dwelling. In this way, whatever he does, he acts according to his goal. What was said about the role of an intelligent cause in performing an action can also be expressed as "the end," "the finality," or "the purpose." Thus, a carpenter who makes a table knows why he is making it, and this is called the chair's end, its finality, and its purpose. The end or finality of such an action may be one or many. If there are many, one will be primary and the others secondary. Since the Lord is the perfectly intelligent cause, there is an end or a finality to all he has made.

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[11] Mateo Ricci states the purpose of his work, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, in this way: "This catechism does not treat of all the mysteries of our holy faith, which need be explained only to catechumens and Christians, but only of certain principles, especially such as can be proved and understood with the light of reason. Thus it can be of service both to Christians and to non-Christians and can be understood in those remote regions which our Fathers cannot immediately reach, preparing the way for those other mysteries which depend upon faith and revealed wisdom." (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 43)

[12] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.22.1, II-II 47.5.

The soul is created by the Lord, and its finality is to have a direct vision of the transcendent-and-immanent Being, and this can be called "liberation," and this is the "end." We shall explain all these points in their appropriate place as needed.

Based on what I have just said, you must listen to the response to your doubt regarding finality. By his deeds a human being must reach that liberation which is taught by the merciful Lord to human beings as their finality. Liberation is a good fortune which transcends human nature.[13] [8] After estimating the strength of human nature, one can assert that human beings will not be competent to attain liberation. Therefore, one has to learn many truths through the Veda given by the Lord, since the knowledge that comes from human intelligence is insufficient. These truths must be known by the divine word of the Lord, since they transcend human nature and cannot be known by human intelligence alone. The human being must reach his finality, namely liberation, by accepting these truths in faith and living according to them. (This point we have explained in great detail in the book *Jñanadipikā*, so it suffices to refer to the point only briefly here.[14])

I.6. Truths about God within the Reach of the Mind

Moreover, in defining the transcendent-and-immanent Being, two kinds of truth are to be known. One type of truth can be grasped by natural human intelligence. In this way one can come to the conclusion that the world is made. After looking at the world and recalling the maxim, "Whatever is seen, is made," and after determining that the world is made, one can conclude that a Lord exists as its cause, that this Lord is one and not many, and that by nature he must possess all goodness. In this way, when analyzing

[13] For comparison, see *Summa contra Gentiles* I, 3-5.

[14] S. Rajamanickam, in his chronology in *the First Oriental Scholar*, indicates that the *Jñanadīpikā* ("Light of Knowledge") is de Nobili's first work, but one that is lost.

the Lord's reality, one can establish many other truths by the effort of human intelligence.[15]

I.7. Truths about God Which are Beyond the Mind

But apart from such truths (known through human intelligence), there are also many other truths about the Lord which are not accessible to human intelligence.[16] For example, there is the incomprehensible mystery that the transcendent-and-immanent Being is threefold.[17] Such truths are not within the grasp of created (and thus limited) human intelligence, so they cannot be established by human intelligence alone. Hence they must be known from the gracious word of the Lord and accepted in faith. Thus human beings must accept truths that are beyond human reason, and must be devoted to the Lord above all things, the Lord who cannot be fully known by reason. Then one can attain that liberation which is a blessing far beyond the reach of created human nature.

[9] Moreover, some people are not able to discern what is good and what is sinful. This is because their minds are confused with the dullness caused by committing various kinds of sins, and by inheriting a sinful nature from past generations. As a result, sin no longer appears to be sin. Thus, a professional thief who has lived for ages by stealing will say that stealing is not a sin; to lustful men, approaching others' wives will not appear to be sinful; to those who worship many gods and who do not believe that there is only one Lord, it will seem to be righteous to worship created things like the sun, and to perform for them rituals meant for the Lord alone. Widows who follow tradition and die along with their husbands, and also those who make them die, will consider so cruel a crime to be righteous.[18] Thus, what is sinful appears not to

[15] This section nicely echoes the Nyāya logical tradition's cosmological proof of God's existence: the world is something made, and must have a maker.

[16] For comparison, see *Summa contra Gentiles* I.3.2.

[17] See section II.7.

[18] A *sati* is a good wife; by extension, it is the act of the immolation of this faithful wife on her husband's funeral pyre; the custom was respected and practiced in parts of India at various times. It is still debated whether *sati*

be a sin at all to the confused minds of people who act contrary to reason. So the Lord's Veda is needed in the world. Through such a revelation, humans can definitely know good and evil, avoid sin, and walk in the way of righteousness.

Disciple: It is already evening, the time for your prayer. Your blessed, ambrosial words have become the only food I need. I will meditate on what you have explained until now, and these undying words will be food for my mind, which will become enlightened by digesting them, so I will be strengthened in knowledge. But tomorrow we must continue this Dialogue, and you must teach me whatever remains to be taught.

The Second Dialogue

II.1 Truths Contained in the Mind and Truths that Go Beyond the Mind[19]

[10] Disciple: I love the ambrosial knowledge communicated in your blessed words — yet that is why there arises within me an even greater desire and hunger for it. I could not remain at home, and that desire has brought me into your presence again.

Master: The difference between food for the corruptible body and food — the ambrosia of wisdom — for the incorruptible soul is the following. Before eating something which is food for the body, there is a desire for it. As one eats and becomes satiated, the mind then becomes averse to it. By contrast, before tasting knowledge, which is food for the eternal soul, the mind will not be very much interested in it, and it will even dislike it the first few times. But as one begins to taste such food, desire for it will increase in the mind without any dislike. That is why a greater desire arose in you after you tasted the wise ambrosia yesterday. Tell me then the doubts that have arisen in you regarding it after

could be a woman's choice or was always a sheer act of violence against the woman

[19] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.12 and the problem of knowledge of God as explained there; also, *Summa contra Gentiles* I.1-9, and III.37-56.

you reflected on all that I said, and I shall remove these doubts by my replies. Then you can listen to what else is to be known after that.

II.2 Who Can Be Trusted?

Disciple: You have explained that the Veda is the word of a trustworthy person, and that one who truthfully speaks what is good is a trustworthy person. Moreover, you have also explained that a created being cannot be called a [fully] trustworthy person. But the Lord is in essence truth itself, and is by nature all good, so the Lord alone is trustworthy. But I have a doubt regarding this.

As you were sharing the wise ambrosia of your teaching with various people at various times, a few bits happened to reach my ears. One of these is the following. I heard that liberated souls who have had the direct vision of the transcendent-and-immanent being will not speak falsehoods nor say evil things. **[11]** But in that case, it seems to me that these liberated souls too should be called trustworthy.

Master: Later, in its proper context,[20] we shall explain how the minds of those who have had direct vision of the Lord will not speak falsehood, and how their minds remain fixed in goodness alone. What you need to be told now is this: the blessing of liberation is not natural to those who enjoy such a blessing, for it is a good beyond their nature. Whatever results in them due to this goodness will also be beyond their nature.[21] Therefore, those who enjoy liberated bliss are not cheated by falsehood and will not deviate from the good. All this is the fruit of the direct vision of the Lord, not qualities natural to them. So they cannot be said to be trustworthy by nature, as the Lord is. We can therefore call only the Lord trustworthy by nature, since he alone is in the form of truth, by nature all good, and by nature unable to be misled, unable to utter falsehood, and established in goodness.

[20] Perhaps in section II.7.

[21] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 109, 1-5.

Moreover, those who are in a liberated state will not say whatever appears to them as good without first considering various truths. So one cannot say that they are trustworthy in everything, completely and in every way. The Lord alone is all-knowing, capable of teaching everything that is good in itself. He alone can be certified, without doubt, as trustworthy in everything.

II.3 The Two Kinds of Truth

Disciple: You said that there are two kinds of truth involved in knowing the Lord as trustworthy. One kind of truth is inaccessible to our intelligence and cannot be comprehended by our minds. [12] The other kind is within the reach of created mind and human intelligence is capable of ascertaining it. You must clear up my doubts on this point.

Master: Mention your doubts one by one, and with the Lord's grace I shall explain clearly whatever emerges in our interchange regarding the truth.

Disciple: Among the truths that we need to know about the Lord, why is it that some are beyond human intelligence?

Master: In order to understand this truth you must know the meaning of "accessible to human reason." The terms "containing," "being contained," "not containing," are characteristic of things which are embodied. For example, a big pot contains a small pot within it, and the small pot is contained within the big pot. That is, the big pot holds the small pot within its four corners and does not let it extend outside. Just as "containing" refers to material things, in some cases it can also refer to actions. Thus, to say "this task fits in my hand" is the same as saying, "This work will be done by me." When it is said that a king rules over a country and that the people are "contained" by the king, this means that the king's word is held high and that the people behave according to the king's advice without violating his commands. In this sense, "it is contained" and "it is not contained" are used.

Moreover, such expressions are occasionally used regarding the way reason functions. I.e., when the mind knows a thing, its nature,

and its qualities — e.g., "being true" — and knows the thing without omitting any qualities, then the object known by the mind becomes "food" for the mind. If this object does not go beyond the mind in a mysterious way, it can be said that the mind contains the object within itself, and the object remains contained within the mind.

[13] The mind may know only a few of the object's characteristics, without knowing other properties of the object, such as its "being true."[22] Such an object does not become fully revealed to the mind, since the mind does not know everything that is to be known about it. In this case one can say that the object exceeds the mind and is not contained within it. When the meanings of "contained within the mind" and "not contained within the mind" are understood in this way, it is not difficult to explain in a similar way the statement that there are truths regarding the Lord which the human mind cannot contain.

In other words, even though there are various truths about the Lord which are established through reason — such as, "the Lord exists" and "the Lord is one" — there are still many other truths like the great mystery that the Lord is three even while being one.[23] Such truths cannot be known by reason alone. Since they are not known, they are said to be "not contained within the mind," but rather to surpass the mind. This can be further explained in the following way.

II.4 The Nature of Perception

When the soul is in union with the body, the mind understands an object by creating within itself a reflection of the object after the bodily senses have grasped it. This is how the mind can establish something more, on the basis of an object which has been grasped by the senses and cognized just a few times by the mind. I.e., the object is present to the sense and imprints its reflection on the sense, and thereafter the sense carries out its function.

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22 Or "existent."

23 For comparison, see p. [8] for another reference to the Trinity.

In this way an object in front of the eye generates its form in the eye, and the eye performs its seeing function with the reflection of that object. [14] When the eye performs its function of seeing by means of the reflection formed in the eye, the mind creates within itself a reflection of the object seen by the eye. In such moments the mind is said to perceive the object directly, i.e., *pratyakṣa*, "before the eye." The *akṣa* (eye) is the faculty; *prati* means "in front of." The object remains in front of the sense organ and creates its reflection in the sense organ. By this reflection in the sense organ the mind creates within it a reflection of the object, and by this the mind in turn comes to know the object at that moment. This is said to be direct knowledge of an object.

In order to clarify such means of knowledge as perception, etc., additional points need to be understood. Later on, when dealing with the soul, we shall explain many things in detail.[24] E.g., from birth onwards, and apart from the sense organs that grasp objects, there is also a common faculty which comprehends the objects that have been grasped by the five senses. There is also a power of imagination which visualizes the reflections of the objects when the objects are not present, and there is also such a thing as memory, which is in the soul. The mind grasps the general nature of an object, and the mind is a power capable of judging it. There are many such things to be known.

But what you need to learn right now is just the following. So that the embodied soul can know objects directly, the objects must first of all be grasped by the bodily sense organs;[25] to be grasped by the senses, these objects must be material. When one considers the fact that the Lord has no body and cannot be perceived by the bodily senses, it becomes clear why the embodied soul can not see the Lord directly.

II.5 The Nature of Inference

Yet the embodied soul does not only see objects directly. [15] It comes to know what cannot be seen directly by means of what it

24 Perhaps in the subsequent work, *Āttumanirṇayam* (*Analysis of the Soul*).
25 For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.3.1, I.12.3.

can see directly. Such a way of knowing is called "assumed" or "inferential" knowledge. For example, from the smoke they can see on a mountain, intelligent people infer that there must also be fire there, even if they cannot see the fire. Because the mind directly sees the smoke, it realizes that there must be fire. So this is called "culled out" seeing, "culled out" knowledge.

It is also called "inferred seeing" or "inferred realization:" since smoke arises from fire, smoke is a sign of fire; by the smoke one comes to know that there is fire. By this means of knowledge intelligent people also know the Lord, in the following way. It is a rule that everything that is seen is produced; since the world is seen, it must therefore be produced. Moreover, one must also establish that there is a cause for everything that is produced.[26] Thus, since the world is produced, one cannot deny that there is a cause for it. Such a cause must exist of itself, for it could not have been produced by some other cause; and if such a cause exists by itself, by its very nature it must possess all goodness.[27]

If these truths are within the grasp of the human mind, then the mind can also understand that there are many other qualities in the Lord which remain immeasurable and mysterious, and they remain unknown to creatures even when they know them (to some extent). So one must say that these qualities are beyond the reach of reason and cannot be contained by reason.

II.6 Two Kinds of Inference

We shall mention just one more point to make very clear how this is so. Inferred knowledge is produced by two kinds of inference. Inference can be said to recognize an effect, [16] but

26 For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.2.
27 As suggested above, the Nyāya logical conception of God as the maker of the world coheres nicely with de Nobili's viewpoint. The current inference, of fire from smoke, and the parallel inference of a maker from the fact of a world, are common to the Nyāya logical tradition. The idea that some characteristics of God — existence, power, unity, goodness — can be known even if the proper nature of God cannot be known by the human mind. For comparison, see *Summa contra Gentiles* I.28, 29; *Summa Theologiae* I.4.3, on the way in which created realities reflect divine perfections.

sometimes the effect will not resemble its cause, and will be less than its cause.

Disciple: What is an effect that resembles its cause?

Master: If the effect is in its nature like the cause, etc., then such an effect is said to resemble the cause. In this way, for example, fire that is produced by fire resembles its cause. I.e., the fire that is producing and the fire that is produced remain equal in their nature, etc. Such an effect reveals everything that is produced by the cause, and in this way the mind can know the cause fully. In other words, there will not be any characteristics in the cause beyond what the mind has understood from the effect. As a result of this, if the effect is contained within the mind, the cause too will be contained in it.[28]

Disciple: Which is an effect that does not resemble its cause?

Master: When the effect is not equal to the cause with regard to its nature, etc., and when the object is inferior to the cause in matters relating to its nature, then it is said not to resemble the cause. When a resemblance does not exist, the mind cannot know all the glory of the cause, even if the cause is known. In other words, an effect that does not resemble its cause is inferior to the cause, and does not contain all the goodness proper to the cause. Since all the goodness belonging to the cause is not contained in this kind of effect, it does not manifest the entire glory of the cause. That is why, even if the mind knows an effect that does not resemble its cause, it will not know fully the glorious qualities of the cause. It can only establish that there is a cause, and that there are several good aspects to the cause. [17] But it does not know completely and in every way all the specific properties that are in the cause.

Disciple: Kindly explain all this to me by way of an example.

[28] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.29.

Master: Imagine someone who is very intelligent, well-informed about many things, enjoying a good name, endowed with great wealth, happiness and honor. Suppose that he makes an image out of clay. Such an image will not be equal to its maker in every one of its powers, its nature, etc., so this effect is said not to resemble its cause. The image will not contain all the goodness of its cause nor will it reveal all its properties. One who looks at this image can conclude that there is a maker for the image, but from this image he cannot know that its cause is endowed with all knowledge and learning, great wealth, honor, and beauty. So too, precious metals like gold, etc., may be considered effects of the sun, but they are inferior to the sun in terms of their natural characteristics. So these effects do not resemble the sun, their cause. From such dissimilar effects which do not contain within them the glorious qualities of the sun, one cannot know that the sun is endowed with qualities such as radiance, etc. In this case, if someone sees precious metals like gold, etc., without seeing the sun directly, he can only conclude that there exists a sun which is the cause of effects, the precious metals, the gold etc., and he can conclude that such a cause is capable of giving luster, etc. But from seeing precious metals like gold he can not conclude that the sun has brilliant rays, that it produces heat in the world through its rays, [18] that it causes rain by gathering up various vapors from the earth and creating clouds out of them, that it helps in the process of producing and destroying various things in the world, that it reveals its luster to the whole world during the twenty-four hour period, that it marks months and the year for the world by passing through all twelve zodiac signs during one year, or, finally, that it does so many of these great favors for the world. Not all these points can be inferred merely by looking at shining metals like gold, etc.

Similarly, although they cannot see the transcendent-and-immanent Being directly, intelligent people can come to know it through effects which do not resemble it.[29] Through such effects they can know that the Lord exists, that he is one, and similar

[29] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.2.2 ad 3.

truths, but they cannot know other great truths about the Lord. That is, even if all the created things in the world are counted one by one and then measured together through research, there will still be an immense distance between them and the transcendent-and-immanent being. His mysterious, immeasurable and glorious qualities cannot all be contained within created objects; created things cannot reveal what they do not contain within themselves. This is why, even if the human mind knows all created things well enough, there will be still many more truths about the Lord that remain unknown. Such truths can be said to exceed and surpass the human mind.

So the brief answer to your question is this: by its own natural power the created intelligence can know the transcendent-and-immanent Being without seeing it directly. But since creatures which do not resemble the creator do not contain within them the goodness of the Lord, they cannot reveal that. Therefore, by looking at effects the human mind cannot know the Lord's mystery with all its glorious characteristics. **[19]** Such truths are said to be unknowable by the human mind, for they exceed and surpass it and are not contained within it.

II.7 The Mystery of the Trinity

You should also note one further specification regarding this. When the human mind knows the transcendent-and-immanent Being through created things, it becomes clear that the created world is very perfect, but that the glory of the Lord is still more perfect. But however much the human mind has understood, and how much created things can make known other truths, they cannot reveal certain truths, e.g., that the Lord is three though one. Were this not revealed, it could not be known by the human mind on its own. Therefore, among the things that we ought to know about the Lord, there will always be some truths about the Lord which remain inaccessible to human reason.

II.8 The Ultimate Fulfillment and Limits of Human Knowing

Disciple: Even if the human mind can know the Lord by inferences made from created things, as you have explained in

detail, nevertheless the transcendent-and-immanent Being cannot be contained within the created human mind.

But were a human to see (that Being) directly, he would see it fully; if he saw it fully, nothing at all would remain hidden. In such a case, it would seem that were the created mind to see the Lord directly, it would also see directly all that is in the transcendent-and-immanent Being, and thus, it would seem, that Being would be contained within the created mind.[30]

Master: This is not the proper time to answer the question you have now raised. We shall explain later that liberated bliss will be greater or less according to the merit or demerit of each person, even though the bliss will be full in every case.[31] At that time we shall answer your question. What you need to know now is only the following.

Since the transcendent-and-immanent Being is endowed with immense goodness by nature, even if the created mind has a direct vision, it will see it only by a power beyond its nature and not otherwise. Such power will be called the light of liberated bliss.[32] **[20]** This light of liberated bliss will always be limited, since it too is a created thing. Since the human mind is limited, it is endowed with limited power, and even if it sees the transcendent-and-immanent Being fully, it still cannot contain it within itself. In other words, the Lord remains fit to be seen more and more by an endless and immense light; Thus, the greater the brilliance, the greater the clarity with which he will be perceived. By more and more precise and clear knowledge, the human mind will come closer and closer to the transcendent-and-immanent Being. By coming closer to him, the human mind perceives more and more

30 The implied question then is whether there can ever be any direct knowledge of God that nevertheless does not compromise God's mystery.

31 On the bliss of liberation, see sections III.2 and IV.3.

32 Literally, the "light sharing in liberation," which is de Nobili's translation for *lumen gloriae*. Regarding the *lumen gloriae*, see *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.53, and *Summa Theologiae* I.12.7.

clearly the Lord of all, and sees his intention to make more and more things.

But however close the human mind approaches the transcendent-and-immanent Being by the light of liberated bliss, it still can approach it with only limited clarity. Therefore, the human mind will not see the Lord without any limits. Instead of knowing him with unlimited clarity, it will be able to see him only according to its own capability. Therefore, however much the mind is filled with the light of liberated bliss, one still must say that it does not contain the transcendent-and-immanent Being within it.

In other words, the human mind will not see the transcendent-and-immanent Being with unlimited light, and it will not see in that Being all the Lord's possible future creations. It will see the Lord only according to the light of liberation granted to that mind and not otherwise. Therefore, even when the undivided transcendent-and-immanent Being is seen directly and fully by the human mind, it will not be approached by the created mind in a way that is fully appropriate to the transcendent-and-immanent Being. So it must be said that the transcendent-and-immanent Being will not be contained within these human minds. Only the Lord has unlimited intelligence, and only he knows himself by his own unlimited knowledge. **[21]** All created minds, however sharp they might be and however much they are enlightened by the light of liberated bliss, cannot know the Lord as the Lord sees and knows himself.

Reflect repeatedly on what we have taught you in this second Dialogue. Become a person with a clear mind, rooted in truth.

The Third Dialogue

III.1 Verbal Knowledge and the Apprehension of God

Master: If you have understood well everything that we taught in the second Dialogue, you can now ask without hesitation whatever else you want to know.

Disciple: Thus far you have explained that there are truths about the transcendent-and-immanent Being which the human mind cannot contain, yet also that one has to know such surpassing truths. But if they cannot be known either by direct perception or by inference, then by what other means of knowledge can one know them?

III.2 How Verbal Knowledge Works

Master: It is for this reason we indicated that by the Lord's will there is a Veda in the world. That is, the mind sees the realities[33] that are present to the mind, and thus it knows them to exist. Since the mind cannot see realities that are not present to it, it has to conclude that they exist based on the testimony of one who has seen them. Therefore, this means of knowledge is called verbal testimony. I.e., verbal testimony refers to words, and this verbal testimony is a means of knowledge, since the mind can come to know what was not present to it, just from someone else's words.

[22] Disciple: Kindly explain to me so that I will have no doubts, the meaning of "being present to the mind" and "not being present to the mind."

Master: If you understand "what is present to the eyes" and "what is absent from the eyes," then you will understand "what is present to the mind" and "what is not present to the mind." That is, if the reflection of an object falls on the eyes, the eye becomes able to see, by means of that reflection. When the eye sees an object, one can say that the object is present to the eye. Since the object is present before the eye and is seen, on that basis one concludes that

[33] Or "truths."

the object exists, not because it is established by someone else's words. If the object does not produce a reflection in the eye, then even while the eye is looking at the object's visible character it will not be carrying the reflection of the object. If it is not carrying it, then one must say that the object is not present to the eye. In this way, one has to reflect as far as possible on what is present to or absent from the mind.

That is, one has to consider whether the object is present a.) by itself, or b.) by a reflection which is similar in nature to the object, or c.) by something necessarily related to the object. If it is present to the mind (in one of these ways), then one can consider the object present to the mind.

Disciple: None of this is clear to me. Kindly explain it to me according to my power of understanding, taking each point one by one, and explaining each in its proper context. Please explain to me in detail when the object is [option a.] itself present in the mind, or [option b.] carried, with regard to its nature, "by a reflection which is similar in nature to the object," or [option c.] what it means that something is "necessarily related to the object" and [on that basis] present to the mind. If I know the meaning of all these things, then I will also know what it means to say that an object is "present to the mind."

[23] Master: You will understand easily when I will explain them one by one, each in its proper context. The Lord is by nature undivided and there is not even an iota of difference between his mind and himself, so it must be said that he is in his mind by himself [option a]. He contains everything within himself in an eminent way, so he knows himself, and he knows all other objects as he knows himself. Therefore everything that can exist is present to his all-surpassing intelligence. He will be seen directly by those who enjoy liberated bliss, for the transcendent-and-immanent Being is present in the minds of those who enjoy liberated bliss.[34]

[34] For comparison, see *Summa Theologiae* I.12.1-5; I.32.1, and *Summa contra Gentiles* IV.1.

Thus it can be said that the object seen by such means is present to the mind by being in the mind.

Disciple: You mentioned that the object is in the mind in two other ways. Now kindly help me to understand [option b.]: what is "a reflection similar in nature to the object," and what is assumed by such reflection as its nature?

Master: Whether a reflection is produced in the object or produced by some other cause which reveals the object in its very nature, this will be called a "natural reflection" of the object. If such modes of reflection are present in the mind in a way that is suited to the nature of the mind, then it can be said that they are assumed by the mind as its own nature. In this way, when the reflection of objects like earth, etc., are present to the mind as explained above, then objects like earth are also said to be present to the mind.

Disciple: You also mentioned [option c.], that there is something in the mind "necessarily related to the object." Kindly tell me what this is all about.

[24] Master: Even when (an object) is not in the mind, still there can be a necessary connection with the object, whether it is there because it has been the object of the mind a few times before, or because it is there by a natural reflection of the object. This can be explained as follows. The mind concludes that there is a cause when it sees an effect whose cause is not seen. Neither the cause nor the reflection of the cause are in the mind, but since the reflection of the effect, which is necessarily related to the cause, is in the mind, then the mind naturally knows that there is a cause; so the truth that there is a cause is present to the mind. You can investigate this and reflect on it.

Similarly, if neither the object of itself [option a.] is in the mind, nor a reflection which is similar in nature to the object [option b.], nor something which is necessarily related to the object [option c.], then that object is said to be not present to the mind at all, since

there is nothing in the mind that enables the mind to go out and grasp such an object. For example, we say that in order to see an object the eye assumes the natural reflection of the object, so the object is present to the eye. So too, if the object is present to the mind in any of the ways explained above, then the mind can know the object, and that object can be said to be present to the mind.

But if the eye does not assume the natural reflection of an object in order that the eye might see the object, it will not see the object naturally in itself, so the object will not be present to the eye. So too, if the object is not present to the mind in any of the ways mentioned above, so that the mind might know its object, then the mind will not know that object by its own power — and we must conclude that the object is not present to it.

An object that is not present to the mind is not seen by the mind. But one can still say that it exists if one trusts the words of one who has seen it. **[25]** A truth that is not present in the mind is not known by the mind, so it has to be accepted in faith, based only on the words of the one who has seen it.

Disciple: With regard to knowing the Lord, what truth is not present to the mind?

Master: Earlier we said that regarding knowledge of the Lord, there are some truths which will not be contained in the mind. Such truths can be said to be truths not present to the mind. That is, if they are not present to the mind by [option a.] being in the mind itself, or [option b.] as reflections befitting its nature, or [option c.] as necessarily related to it, such truths are not present to the mind. If they are not present to the mind, then the mind will not be capable by itself of knowing such truths. Rather, it has to take them in faith, based on the words of one who has seen them.

III.3 Revelation and the Higher Truths

Disciple: Then you must tell me who are these people who have seen such truths.

Master: While talking about the transcendent-and-immanent Being that exceeds the created mind, we must say that the Lord knows completely and in every way truths that are not known to the created mind. Therefore, intelligent people should come to see such mysterious truths about the Lord by listening to the Veda granted us by the Lord; they must trust in his holy word, accept those truths in faith, and walk in the path taught by him. There is a Veda in the world, willed by the Lord, and through the means of this verbal testimony, people endowed with reason should be able to live, knowing that truth which is not present to the mind and which surpasses the power of the mind.

III.4 Revelation and Ordinary Truth

[26] Disciple: As you have explained it, truths which are not present to the mind and are not contained in the mind must be known by the Veda willed by the Lord. But why should the Lord also teach us to accept in faith, through the Veda, truths which are known to the human mind and which are present to the mind?

Master: While discussing the Lord we said that apart from the truths that exceed the power of the human mind, some truths can be known by the mind by means of inference. But the Lord must teach the people even these truths through the Veda, so that the people will have faith in them. If they are not taught in this way, three kinds of fault will result.

First, even among those endowed with reason there will be only a few who will actually know such truths, while many will not know them. Such truths as "the Lord exists" and "the Lord is one" can be known with certainty by created intelligence. But one must first of all learn about "cause" and "effect," and only then will "the relation between cause and effect" be learned with clarity. Then the mind will come to know without doubt that the Lord exists. This is achieved by inference, which takes great effort. One has to realize that there cannot be an endless series of causes;[35] one then learns that everything in the world happens in order and with precision;

[35] And therefore, that a first cause is required.

one then concludes, with sufficient reason, that there is one Lord. Since the Lord is the cause of everything, one also concludes that the Lord must exist due to himself, and that he must be all good.

But all of this can be learned only with great difficulty, since it involves great effort and is not easily learned. Since it requires great effort, sick people and lazy people will not be capable of making this effort, so they will not take pains to learn such truths definitively.

[27] Moreover, it takes a long time to know such truths surely. Therefore, farmers and business people and those involved in similar occupations, and those who are in charge of state administration and care for the people, will not be able to spend a long time in studies. So they will not be able to know such truths. Thus, only a very few people will know such truths by reasoning, while others will not make very great efforts to learn. Therefore, to obviate this situation, the Lord must also teach through the Veda even these truths which can be known by the human mind through inference; he will enable people to accept them in faith, so that all will be saved by such knowledge.

Second, if the truth is not established in this way, another drawback will arise. An intelligent person must struggle hard, making efforts to study for a long time in order to know all these truths with certainty by using the power of reason. Only after struggling for a long time in studies can one come to know such truths, and not at the beginning stage of studies. So intelligent people will (for a long time still) not know for certain such truths as "the Lord exists." During that long period there will be no great devotion to the Lord, since the mind can not be devoted to something which is not known in some way or another.

Moreover, human beings are attached to things, caught in the net of lust, anger, etc., and so they stray. As they are enslaved by this wandering, they cannot concentrate their minds on these truths. For it is only with a steady mind that human beings come to the wisdom of these many truths, not otherwise. **[28]** A human being

will therefore remain ignorant for a long time without knowing these truths, and will miss the benefit of knowing them during that time. Therefore, in order to obviate the drawback that human beings might not know such truths as "the Lord exists," etc., for a long time, the Lord also taught them through his Veda and made people accept in faith truths that might also have been understood by reason.

Third, if he had not taught them in this way, another drawback would also have resulted. The mind cannot know anything without a combination of images produced by the imaginative power in accord with the limited power of the mind. Falsehood occasionally gets mixed in with human considerations. As a result, among those who know such truths there will be dull-witted people who do not fully understand the strength of the arguments that establish those truths, and they will doubt whether falsehood is present or not when they prove such truths. Therefore, the Lord who is in essence truth and who speaks no falsehood also reveals through the Veda truths that could be known by the power of created mind. He teaches people to accept them in faith, so that everyone can accept without even the slightest doubt truths such as "the Lord exists" and "the Lord is one."

To summarize: by its own power, the created mind is capable of establishing and proving such truths as "the Lord exists," but the Lord nevertheless willed to teach these truths through the Veda and to make people accept in faith truths which could also be known by the power of human mind, for the following reasons: that all may know them easily, instead of there being only a few people who would come to know such truths; that human beings need not remain ignorant of these truths over a long period of time; that they can know them even when young; that even dull-witted people will not have to doubt such truths; and that the whole of humanity will be of one mind, without division. **[29]** After you have reflected on these points, we shall see what else needs to be discussed in our fourth dialogue.

The Fourth Dialogue

IV.1 Which is the True Veda?

Disciple: You have explained that the Veda intended by the Lord must be present in the world in some form or another. In order that humans might know the Lord, he himself must have made people learn, through his Veda, both truths that are present to the mind and truths that are not present to it. I have grasped these points well.

But concerning such matters you must still make a few more things clear to me. First, is the Lord's Veda one or many? Second, there have been many viewpoints which appeal to the Veda,[36] at various times; did the Lord create them all? If the Lord did not teach them all, how did they come to exist in our world? Third, since these existing religious viewpoints contradict each other, it seems that not everything in all of them can be true, and therefore that not every such viewpoint has been created by the Lord. In this situation what then are the criteria by which one comes to know which Veda is the one revealed by the Lord? Kindly explain to me in detail the criteria I should use in determining, among the Vedas existing on earth, which is revealed and which is not revealed by the Lord.

Master: We shall answer one by one the questions you have raised, so that you can clearly understand our replies to them.

If individual letters (of the alphabet) are all mixed together, their (original) form will not be clear to those reading them. But if these letters are written distinctly, then one can understand what they are. Similarly, if all truths are explained together, the mind will not comprehend them. [30] But if one explains them one by one without mixing them all together, they will be clear to the mind and one will be able to understand them easily.

[36] I.e., *vedamata*: in Hindu theological discourse, a *matam* is an opinion or viewpoint. *Matam* is often taken to indicate a religious or philosophical position or school of thought, treated as one among many, and often as surpassed by a final, correct position.

IV.2 Is there One Veda or Many?

The first question you raised is this: is the Veda revealed by the Lord one or many? We shall answer it now.

The Veda revealed by the Lord teaches the truths all people need to learn and the virtues they need to practice, and it rules out those sinful deeds which are unfit for everyone. Since the truths to be learned and the virtues to be practiced are of many kinds, it is necessary to inform and teach them through multiple instructions. Moreover, indecent sin comes in many forms, so it must be removed through numerous teachings. Every word thus spoken is from the Lord, and each of these words is called "Veda." Through these many different words the Lord has revealed all the truths and virtues necessary for human liberation.

The total collection of these instructions can be called "the Veda revealed by the Lord," since the Lord, who is by nature truth, has revealed all of this himself. None of these instructions will in any way contradict others among his instructions. They must all be true and must all agree with one another, for it cannot be otherwise. Seen from this perspective one must say that all the statements of the Lord form just one Veda which includes many statements. It cannot be spoken of as many, or in the plural.

In the proper context[37] we shall explain whether there is a difference between older and newer (instructions from God) and how one should understand the difference. What you need to know now is just the following.

IV.3 Stages in Revelation

Like young people, the world in its youth was not mature enough to walk the path of righteousness completely and in every way, [31] so the Lord gave the world teachings suitable to its stages of development in those days, although there were hints at the full and mature right knowledge which was to come later on. When the fullness of time fixed by the Lord arrived, the time for

[37] In the next section, IV.3.

loosing the bonds of sin and leading the world to the shore of liberated bliss, then the all-merciful Lord deigned to be born as a human.

The almighty Lord became a human being in this world, moved about; he granted humans maturity in all knowledge along with the strength to walk in the way of all righteousness. He taught the highest way of righteousness for those people who reached the highest stage (of maturity), just as a father teaches his children and the older people in the house differing kinds of behavior and differing works (appropriate to their ages). So too, in his kingdom the almighty Lord and maker first gives teachings to those who, like children, have not reached the fullness of knowledge; these are teachings suited to their early stage of development. Later on, to those who are like elders, i.e., to those who have reached perfection due to his grace, he gives the highest code of conduct in accordance with their ability for knowledge, and this too is his gift.

What the Lord revealed to people with less maturity in knowledge can be called the "old Veda," while what he granted to those with full maturity in knowledge can be called "new Veda." But both were revealed by one and the same Lord, and there is no contradiction between them. Both are true. The difference between them is like the difference between the stages of childhood and old age, nothing more.[38] [32] This is why we said that the Lord taught the commandments in a manner which was appropriate to a world which for some time was like a child. Then, after he became

[38] It is interesting to note how this discussion on whether there is one Veda or not too is paralleled in Aquinas. In the treatise on law in the *Summa Theologiae* (II.I.91), Aquinas goes on to ask whether there is just one such divine law. Thinking mainly of the "Old Law" and the "New Law," he says that the complete and mature revelation of the divine law is preceded by preparatory versions of it: "The salvation of man could not be achieved otherwise than through Christ, according to *Acts* 4.12: 'There is no other name... given to men, whereby we must be saved.' Consequently, the law that brings all to salvation could not be given until after the coming of Christ. But before His coming it was necessary to give to the people, of whom Christ was to be born, a law containing certain rudiments of righteousness unto salvation, in order to prepare them to receive him." (*Summa Theologiae* II.1.91.5, obj. 2)

human, the Almighty graciously taught the path of the highest righteousness to those who were longing for righteousness and who, like elders, were in possession of full maturity in knowledge. You must accept this as a brief reply to the first question you raised earlier (at the beginning of the chapter). Even if all this does not become fully clear now, at the right time and place you will come to understand with greater clarity all that I mean.

IV.4 Why Are There So Many Vedas?

Disciple: Then you can now reply to my second question. There are many viewpoints which appeal to the Veda, and various belief systems in the world, but they are not in harmony with one other. So tell me whether they are all composed by the Lord or not.

Master: There is a popular saying, "Whatever exists is true, whatever does not exist is false." I.e., if a word corresponds to an existing object, then it is said to be a true word, but if a word does not correspond to an existing object, it is said to be untrue. Therefore, if something is claimed to be existing and also not existing, both these claims cannot be true. If one examines the two statements — "the Lord exists," and "the Lord does not exist" — both cannot be true. One must be true and the other false. Similarly when it is said, "the Lord is a material being (with a body)" and "the Lord is spiritual being," both statements cannot be true. One must be false and the other true. As with these examples, you must think similarly regarding other statements.

[33] Thus, the many viewpoints appealing to the Veda which we find in the world do not agree with one another; what is said in one will be denied in the other, and what is established as true in one will be considered false in the other. But as was explained above, both cannot be true, and both cannot be taken as spoken by the Lord whose very form is truth. For the Lord who is all truth cannot speak falsehood. This transcendent-and-immanent Being cannot say "yes" in one place and "no" in another. Were someone to claim this, it would be like saying that the Lord is a liar, dull-witted, or mean. Such sinful words are not fit to be uttered by the mouth or heard by the ears.

Moreover, if the Lord denies in one place what he affirms in another, then one would have to say that instead of redeeming the world the Lord has ruined it. If what was affirmed in one place is denied in another, the mind will get confused, since it will not know which of the two to grasp. When the mind is confused it will be caught in the darkness of ignorance, and in the process of knowing the Lord, ignorance is the cause of all sins. If the Lord who is the source of all good were to deny in one place what he affirmed in another, then it would be the Lord himself who confuses the mind and makes it fall into that ignorance which is the cause for every sin. But to make this accusation against the Lord who is all good would be a great sin indeed. All these (contradictions in the Veda) would prevent the mind from reaching the truth, and the mind would be caught between mutually contradictory sayings. Therefore, were the Lord to utter mutually opposing words, one would have to say that the Lord puts obstacles before the mind and hinders it from reaching the truth. **[34]** Instead of yielding to the impulse to utter these sinful words, one must instead admit that the Lord who is all true does not teach mutually contradictory viewpoints.

IV.5 Why There Cannot Be Many Paths to the Same Truth

Disciple: What you have said sounds logical. But you must respond to this common belief: just as there are many roads leading to the same town and many rivers flowing into the same ocean, so too, they say, there are numerous viewpoints according to which one can know the transcendent-and-immanent Being and reach the ultimate bliss. How are we to assess this view?

Master: We can explain the truth very clearly by employing the very same example. One will not reach a town which lies to the north by walking in the opposite direction, towards the south. Similarly, one can know the Lord who is by nature truth only through words of truth which point towards him, not through false sayings that contradict the truth. Although there may be many roads leading to a town, only if all of them head in the same direction without contradicting one other, will everything be all right. Similarly, one can say that there are many paths leading to

the truth proclaimed by the Lord in the true Veda. Within the fold of the one true Veda there can be people living different ways of life, e.g., renunciation or the life of the student, etc.,[39] but all these people are living in accord with the one Veda given by the Lord, and looking towards the same truth. If people are devoted to the same truth without discord, even while traveling along different paths they can still reach the ultimate bliss by knowing the one transcendent-and-immanent Being.

Moreover, one can also say that the various kinds of ascetic and ritual practices are "many paths." Since these all stand within the one and the same Veda, they will all lead to the higher truth without contradiction or discord. **[35]** So even if there are many such paths, those who follow these paths will reach ultimate bliss.

But if a person walks a path of sin which goes against the higher truth, he will not look at truth and will not understand properly the Lord who is by nature true. If someone wants to reach the solar region, whichever paths he follows and in whichever direction he starts out, he must still ascend. If on the contrary he descends, he will never reach the solar region. Similarly, following the truth and walking in the path of righteousness are like ascending; traveling the path of sin is like descending. If one wants to reach the shore of ultimate bliss one should follow the path of that Veda which teaches the higher truth. One must not follow the path of untruth that leads only downward.

IV.6 Which is the True Veda?

Disciple: Thus far you have explained that there can be only one Veda given in some form or other by the Lord to this world; all other and contradictory viewpoints cannot be proclaimed by the Lord. But regarding this there is still room for another doubt (my third question): everyone claims that the viewpoint and the revelation he follows is really the one proclaimed by the Lord

[39] These possibilities mark the first and fourth of the traditional ways of life (*āśramas*) ideally followed by the upper-caste Hindu male: student (*brahmacāri*), householder (*gṛhastha*), forest-dweller (*vanaprastha*), and renunciant (*saṁnyāsi*).

himself. In this situation, how, by what criterion, can I discover which Veda is revealed by the Lord?[40] By which characteristic or sign can I decide which, among all the existing religious viewpoints, is the one revealed by the Lord, and which are those not proclaimed by the Lord?

Master: The answer to your question needs to be elaborately explained, but what I have already taught suffices for today. In the next dialogue we shall speak about this appropriately.

The Fifth Dialogue

V.1 Which is the True Veda?

[36] Disciple: Like a small child longing to see its mother, I am longing to listen carefully to the truth to be explained today. A child is not able to protect itself, but must survive and be protected by listening to the words of its mother. A human being is like that child. In the matter of seeking eternal life a human is incapable of attaining eternal life by his own intelligence, so he must listen to the words of the true God who is more concerned for him than his own mother; he must live with firm faith, not otherwise.[41]

As you have explained above, God could not have proclaimed all these religious viewpoints which exist in the world and contradict one another. A human must struggle hard to discover which Veda was given by God to this world, since true life is contained in this Veda. Apart from it, whatever favor might come cannot be considered true bliss or true good. Therefore, consider this troublesome work a favor to me and please explain to me which Veda is revealed by God, and so too the characteristics of the religious viewpoint based on it. Then I will be able to follow it steadfastly.

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40 The third question from the beginning of the chapter.

41 For comparison, see Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, #29: "Those in distress call upon Him for pity and look to Him for salvation as to a compassionate father and mother."

V.2 The Need for Detached Reflection

Master: All that you have said is indeed true. The mind deluded by sin will find it hard to discern clearly which Veda has been revealed by the Lord and which are not thus revealed. Especially for people living in a country where there are many kinds of religious viewpoint, it will not be easy for the mind to discern the truth. **[37]** But without discerning the truth and holding it firmly, the mind will be as it were tied down by the bonds of the various and mutually contradictory religious viewpoints. But by the grace of God and by heeding the characteristics listed here, an intelligent person will find out which religious viewpoints are not revealed by God. To accomplish this, the intelligent person must be without bias, must not let his mind get inordinately attached to anything, and must have a firm desire to find that true knowledge which leads to liberation. If the Veda revealed by God reaches his ears, then according to these characteristics he will recognize it by God's grace, live accordingly, and reach the ultimate bliss.

Disciple: You are explaining these characteristics so that we can discern the truth; why must the person who listens be without bias and without inordinate attachment to anything?[42]

Master: If not, the mind would not be able to grasp the truth, even if one were to hear it in an ordinary and normal way. To a sick person whose tongue is affected by a preponderance of bile, sweet things like sugarcane, etc., taste bitter. Similarly, when the mind is biased towards falsehood and obstinately remains unduly attached to it, even if it hears the truth it dislikes it and does not accept the taste of truth. If sugarcane tastes bitter, it is the fault of the mouth, not of the sugarcane. So too, if the truth appears different and without its real taste to a mind affected by sickness and addicted to falsehood, this is a flaw in the mind; one cannot conclude that it is a fault in the flawless truth. That is why we said that one who is desirous of seeking the truth must be free from undue attachment to things.

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42 In the Nyaya analysis of flaws in argument, *calam* (Sanskrit, *chālā*) is a futile answer, and *cāti* (Samskrit, *jāti*) is a useless answer.

To write a correct letter in the place of a wrong letter written on a palm leaf, [38] one must first delete the wrong letter and then write the correct one. The mind is like the writing tablet; if a falsehood has been written there like an incorrect letter, it is not proper to imprint the truth, which is like a correct letter, without first eradicating the falsehood by scraping it off. This is why we say that one desirous of knowing truth must be like a palm leaf with nothing written on it, possessing a mind untainted by inordinate attachments to anything.

Disciple: What you have said is indeed reasonable. If fragrant *kasturi* balm is kept in a dirty pot which has a bad smell, its scent will be spoiled by getting mixed with that smell. To avoid this, all dirt must be removed from the pot, and only then can one place the fragrant balm in it. So too, if the mind, which is like the pot, is dirtied by falsehood, all this dirt must be removed and the mind made pure. After that, the mind will be fit to receive the truth which is by nature fragrant. As you have required above, my mind is longing for truth; it is without bias and I have given up all inordinate attachments. So kindly teach me the truth which you see fit to impart to me.

V.3 Characteristics of the True Veda

Master: To discern which Veda comes from the Lord and which is not from him is difficult for people whose minds are deluded by sin, biased in favor of falsehood, and inordinately attached to things. But it will be easy for those who eagerly search for truth and are untainted by sin. To such people the merciful Lord will make known his Veda by one means or another, in some way or another, and they will accept it with the Lord's help as soon as they hear it.

The first characteristic of the Lord's Veda is that it must appear to the mind as reasonable, since it is entirely true. The mind will perceive and accept it with full consent, since it is in accordance with the mind. [39] Light should be acceptable to the healthy eye, not unpleasant. Similarly, the truth, which is like a light, should be acceptable to the healthy mind devoid of sin, not otherwise.

Moreover, when the mind looks back and reflects on the truth, it will appear more and more agreeable to it, not otherwise. For example, however much fragrant balm is churned up and down, its fragrance remains and no bad smell emanates from it. Similarly, the mind will accept the Veda of the Lord since it is all true. The mind will analyze it again and again with great desire, and it will always experience the sweet scent of truth and at no time find it stinking with falsehood.

That is why the Veda given by the Lord is said to be a good father to the mind and a good teacher too. It is like the father who teaches his child everything that is required, so the child makes the teaching his own. A good teacher teaches his student pleasing truths, and by such teaching the student happily attains full knowledge and experiences the joy of it, after removing the darkness that comes from ignorance. Similarly, the Veda revealed by the Lord is like a good father to the mind. Like a good teacher the Lord will teach the truth that is agreeable to the mind, including hidden truths. The mind will escape the anxiety of not seeing the truth and will rest content in full acceptance. It will be free from doubt and remain firm in the truth.

Disciple: How is it that this characteristic is found only in the Veda revealed by the Lord and not in other religious viewpoints?

[40] **Master:** Religious viewpoints not revealed by the Lord have been taught by various people. They are deficient in matters pertaining to the truth and will not be very agreeable to the mind. Therefore, even if the mind reflects on these religious viewpoints it will not rest content in them with the same full acceptance and clarity with which it would rest content in the Veda revealed by the Lord.

V.4 The Original Veda and the Origins of Religions[43]

Disciple: Kindly explain to me in detail why it happens this way.[44]

[43] It is here that "Part 2" of the *Dialogue* begins, i.e., the application of the general principles to the specifically Indian context.

Master: In order to understand this truth one must understand how the various religious viewpoints found in the world originated. This is the question you raised in the Fourth Dialogue, but since there was no opportunity in that context to answer the question, we did not answer it there. Now we can explain it, since this is the proper context.

The Veda which the Lord gave to the world as a help to human beings was known (in the beginning). But in the course of time and in certain places great sinners, due to their sinful behavior, began to dislike the Veda given by the Lord, (misusing) the freedom which the Lord had given them in order that they might accept truth and righteousness. The reason they disliked and gave up the Lord's Veda was that in this Veda deeds of righteousness are taught, deeds repugnant to them, which exclude the sinful deeds in which they indulge. Thus, earlier generations did not teach the Veda to the next generations. By now a long period of time has intervened, and in some places the Veda of the Lord has entirely ceased to exist.

V.5 Atheism and its Causes

In the absence of the Lord's revealed Veda, some people very much steeped in sin and mentally warped due to it fashioned numerous completely false religious viewpoints. E.g., they said, "There is no creator Lord in the world," [41] "The human soul will disappear along with the body," "The world exists by itself without cause; it moves by itself and it will always exist like this."

Among these false religious viewpoints some very bad ones came into existence, and due to them all kinds of unreasonable steps, sins, and strange behavior occur among people who follow such religious viewpoints. Not even an iota of righteousness remains in them. Thus, the followers of this kind of religious viewpoint deny that there is a Lord who rewards or punishes people according to their good or bad deeds. They think to themselves that they can steal without any fear and keep indulging

[44] I.e., how and why there is this competition among multiple candidates for the title of "true religion" and "true Veda."

in dirty, lustful and revolting deeds without shame, they believe that there is no harm in committing cruel murderous deeds which arise due to the confusion that is born of anger. They omit only those sinful delights which they cannot reach. Otherwise, they will commit every sin they possibly can.

Since they consider the soul to be perishable, the followers of this sinful religious viewpoint go in search of pleasures that are common to animals and humans. They do so with great eagerness, right up to death. Ignoring the (voice of) reason given them by the Lord, they go to hell to suffer there forever, ruining themselves like ordinary animals devoid of intelligence. Apart from ruining themselves, such wicked people also write books in various languages like Sanskrit[45] in order to establish their religious viewpoints and thus ruin other people too.

V.6 The Materialist Denial of God

In these works they struggle to establish their viewpoints through various arguments. They accept only perception (as a means of knowledge) and deny inference and scripture. Like animals devoid of intelligence, they stubbornly insist that apart from what we perceive with our eyes nothing else exists. [42] Keeping such misconceptions in mind they assert that the Lord does not exist, since he is not visible to the eye; that once separated from the body the soul will disappear like an extinguished light, since it is not visible to the eye; and that the world has no beginning, since one cannot see how it originated.

V.7 Reasonable Knowledge that God Exists

Disciple: Kindly tell me why the mind so completely accepts this religious viewpoint that contradicts reason, and thus does not reach the satisfactory state proper to itself.

[45] Literally, "Grantha," which can indicate Sanskrit, its common script, or occasionally other languages as well. Usually de Nobili means the Sanskrit language.

Master: They establish their viewpoint by arguing that apart from what is seen nothing else exists. They do not accept inference and scripture in addition to direct perception.

But there cannot be any lie more blatant than what they say. How can one say that it will rain, just by seeing the clouds darkening with thunder and lightning, before actually seeing rain? How can one conclude that it rained on the mountain, without seeing rain on the mountain, just from the fact that the river is flooded? How can one say with certainty that there must a builder, just by seeing the house he lives in, yet without seeing him? We insist that apart from direct perception there is also inference. Through inference one can say that there is an architect, just by looking at the house, even without seeing the one who built it.

Why then cannot one look at the great house of the world and say that there is someone who built it? Seeing a flood in the river one can say that a cause exists for the flood, even if this cause is not seen. The world is like the river; when one sees so many things come into being in a proper way, remain (for a time) and then disappear, how can one deny the existence of the cause, even if one does not see it?

[43] Apart from proving that besides direct perception there is also inference, all these things also make known to the world that the Lord exists. Thus, there is no alternative to accepting that the Lord is the cause of the world which is like a house. So many things come newly into being and then disappear. For this, (the Lord's) command is the primary cause, nothing else.

Moreover, even if by faulty thinking the followers of this viewpoint deny that verbal knowledge is a proper means of knowledge, they should eventually accept it. How can anyone know that he was born to his father, or that his mother bore him in her womb? He has not seen this for himself. But one can know by inference that just as there are fathers and mothers for others, he too must have a father and a mother. But inference does not show that he was born to this particular father or that this particular

mother gave him birth. Therefore he trusts the words of other people in the world and says "This one is my father," and "That one is my mother." One therefore has to admit that scripture is means of knowledge beyond direct perception and inference. If one can accept in faith what is said by human beings who are less intelligent and who tell lies at various times for various reasons, how much more would it be against reason and logic not to accept in faith what was revealed by the Lord, who is infinite knowledge himself and who is by essence true? The Lord is the cause of the world, by nature he is all good, and he is the protector of all people.

Therefore, intelligent people cannot think that the Lord would not give the Veda so that they could follow righteousness and avoid sin. **[44]** In regard to many other things people trust the testimony of the world and believe that many things which they have not seen exist. So why cannot the testimony of all people be accepted when people say, "The Lord exists"?

When one accepts the truth that the Lord exists, this becomes a great shining light to all people. Even if a person is not interested in seeing this truth, one can say that this truth enlightens his mind, so that even without his knowing it he assents, "This is true!" This is why at difficult moments human beings look up and spontaneously cry, "O Lord, protect me!" When the fear of war is overwhelming, when the cruelty of great sickness is torturing them, when people are frightened of a famine that is coming due to lack of rain, when they know that disaster will strike the world due to a great flood, in those moments words like, "O Lord, you are my refuge, you must save me!" spontaneously burst forth, even if one does not intend to speak thus. This is indeed true, entirely true.

V.8 Why It Is Reasonable to Believe Revelation

Disciple: It cannot be doubted that there is inference besides direct perception (as another means of knowledge); so too, through inference it is firmly established that the Lord exists. Kindly tell me in more detail how reason can know the truth beyond the limits of direct perception and inference, by trusting the Lord's word. For

some followers of this (materialist, skeptical) viewpoint say that this sort of verbal testimony cannot be a means to knowledge.

Master: We have already shown that besides direct perception there is inference, and that by inference we can know with certainty that the Lord exists. It will not be very difficult to show that verbal testimony, which has been denied by them, is also a means. **[45]** If God exists in the world, he must be the cause of the world and its protector. That people might be redeemed and reach the shore of liberated bliss, the proper path of righteousness must be taught. Reasonable people must accept without doubt what has been taught by the Lord. For example, many people have not themselves seen Rome or Bengal, but they know for certain that these places exist just from the words of people who have seen them. Similarly, if the Lord reveals what we have not seen, we should firmly believe that it does exist.

As was explained above, if we can believe what is spoken by humans who are less intelligent and who are capable of telling lies for various reasons at various times, we should accept what has been revealed by the Lord, who is himself the truth and who can never tell lies. We should accept it with more certainty than something we have seen for ourselves. Even if the sense organs, the eyes, etc., are deceived, and even if the whole of humanity gets deluded and tells lies, the Lord, whose form is infinite knowledge, would never deceive us. Since he is limitless good by his very nature, he cannot utter falsehood. Even if humans cannot see how the world could be created by such a Lord, one must accept the fact that the world was created by him. We shall speak about this when explaining the creation of the world.[46]

Disciple: I have grasped well what you have explained until now. Tell me what else I should learn.

V.9 The Critique of the Atheist and Materialist Positions

Master: That this (atheist, materialist) religious viewpoint is false can be proven by various arguments. I shall now explain one

[46] Apparently in another treatise.

of these arguments. For whatever is the cause of many sins and injustices cannot be agreeable to reason and justice. **[46]** This (atheistic) viewpoint is the cause for all sins and injustices, so it must be against reason and justice. But if it is against reason and justice, then reason cannot remain settled on it nor agree to it with full consent.

Disciple: Whatever is the cause for many sins cannot but be against reason and justice, so there is no doubt that reason undeluded by sin cannot remain settled on such things. But how can one establish that this viewpoint is the cause of many sins and injustices?

Master: There is no need to doubt that the human being has been pushed into many sinful things by this viewpoint. One who indulges in stealing will resist his fondness for stealing out of fear, if he knows that there is a king in the town who will inquire into everyone's deeds and punish the guilty. Likewise, if one knows that the king will honor the virtuous, everyone will be inclined to do what is good. But if one thinks that there is no king who will condemn those who do wicked deeds like stealing, etc., or reward those who act justly, this thought alone will be greatly responsible for the commission of many sins. Similarly, if a sinner, blinded in his reason which is covered over with many sinful inclinations, thinks that there is no Lord in the world who judges good and evil, or that the human soul does not exist after death so as to be able to experience heaven for good deeds and hell for evil deeds, **[47]** then he will not avoid getting immersed, without shame or fear, in the stinking mud of sinful lust, like a pig that rolls in that stinking mud and enjoys it, and he will drown there.[47] He will do everything within his reach and avoid only those sinful enjoyments which are beyond his reach. Without realizing that he is caught in the unloosened net of eternal death, he will enjoy himself, commit all sorts of sins, and do harm to himself. To prosper by violently harming others will be his only sense of justice, and he will

[47] This too is a comparison which would resonate with a section of his audience. In the section of the Śaiva text *Civañānacittiyār* where other sects are severely criticized, the ignorant are compared to pigs wallowing in mud.

consider it his life's right path. Such people will consider the joys experienced in this world as what is proper to humans. They will consider time not spent enjoying wealth as time wasted in vain.

V.10 The Difference Between Animals and Humans

Similarly, they will suffer like animals devoid of intelligence, because they dislike the glory of reason given to humans by their creator. They will not reflect that their bodily form is by nature meant to look upwards and walk upright; by their wicked ways they will act in conformity to the bent-down form of animals. For the Lord and creator revealed the difference between the natures of the human body and the animal body by showing in many ways two truths, i.e., that humans have an imperishable soul and that there is a heaven. The life of animals originates in the earth along with the body and it returns to the earth along with the body, for this animal life survives only on earth and not beyond it. In order to indicate this truth, the Lord gave animals bodies which are naturally bent-down, so they are always looking at the earth which contains their life, and at nothing more. Although humans possess bodies made of clay, unlike the body the soul remains imperishable. **[48]** The Lord made humans to stand naturally upright, so that they would realize that they have not only a life that perishes on earth, but also another, imperishable treasure that belongs to heaven and which they must attain by their straightforward and just behavior.

But instead of being reasonable and looking upwards at their imperishable wealth, by their sinful behavior people look down at this perishable life; by their great desire they ruin themselves. They are human in name alone, for they have lost the greatness of human nature and go about vainly with an erect bodily form. Even though a few animals — birds, etc. — are in some way able to look upwards at heaven above, humans alone were given by their very nature the form needed to look straight up at heaven, raising their heads upwards. There is no need to doubt that a viewpoint which makes people who are by nature able to look straight upwards look instead downward like animals is a viewpoint contrary to reason

and justice. Such a religious viewpoint is against reason, and the mind cannot rest content with it.

Disciple: You have explained how the viewpoint which denies there is a God arose, and so you have explained how the first characteristic of a true Veda is absent (in materialist and atheistic systems). In the same way please explain other viewpoints to me.

Master: Today's dialogue has became very long, and there is no time to explain anything else. In tomorrow's Sixth Dialogue we shall tell you what else needs to be learned.

The Sixth Dialogue

VI.1 Nature Worship: Idolatry without Idols[48]

Master: When we examine the behavior of those who do not think carefully about the Lord, we must be astonished at the misery they suffer, and feel very sorry for them.

[49] The transcendent-and-immanent Being created everything, keeps it under his control and supervises it. It is reasonable that such a Lord alone must be worshipped in the highest way. But in some places he is forgotten, and it is as if he does not even exist. Those under the spell of sin do not praise and worship him. Their reason is blinded, and in their pride they think about non-sentient beings, which were created for the sake of humans as a help to them, much more than they reflect on the creator who is the cause of all such things. In such a confused inquiry, created things, which are effects, are considered the creator, the cause. Thus they pay homage to created things which are of less importance, by image worship and rituals which are appropriate only to the Lord who is the immensely glorious cause, the creator of all things.

VI.2 Mistaking the Elements of Nature for God

Disciple: Now help me to see what sort of viewpoint this is. How did (idolatry) originate? How is it lacking in the first characteristic which marks the Lord's revelation?[49]

Master: For the reason explained above the Lord's Veda was forgotten in some places and even ceased to exist. Some were hesitant to say the Lord does not exist, so they accepted the truth that

[48] Most of the remaining chapters of the *Dialogue* are devoted by de Nobili to an analysis of kinds of natural and social idolatry. He categorizes Hindu religious beliefs and practices as idolatry or, more precisely, as image-worship gone wrong, so that the images become an end in themselves or crudely positivistic representations of God. See the introduction to this volume for some observations on the importance of this characterization of religions as idolatry.

[49] As in 5.3 above, the true revelation and religion must not be contradictory to reason.

he exists. But since they did not know that the Lord is truth by nature, they thought many contrary thoughts in their minds; in the ignorance of those twisted minds they established various created objects as the transcendent-and-immanent Being. They thought in contradictory modes of thinking that were suited to their deranged minds. They did conclude that the Lord who is the cause of the world must be great, that he must enlighten the world and protect it, but instead of knowing equally well the characteristics proper to the Lord, they thought that they had measured the infmitely glorious Lord by their deluded reasoning, [50] and so they concluded that the Lord has only those characteristics that dawned on them, and that greater glory than those did not exist in the Lord.

Thus they saw some characteristics in the sun and therefore invoked the sun, thinking, "This is the Lord, this the Lord," and accepted this in their hearts. In the same way some considered the moon and the stars as different lords and performed (for them) all the rituals proper to the Lord. Not satisfied with ruining themselves, they struggled hard to establish their false viewpoints so that later generations too might accept the falsehood which appeared to them as truth.

The way in which they established their viewpoint is the following. Considering the brightness of the sun, the moon, and the stars, the regularity with which they rotate in time, and the benefits the world gains by them, they had to admit that these possess great glory, intelligence, and the goodness of nature. Therefore, they wrote, these things should be called various lords, and so they became deluded in their minds. They did not discover the greater truth which lay within the truth they had seen. While investigating God according to the truth they had seen, they established falsehoods detrimental to themselves.[50]

[50] In the Biblical *Book of Wisdom* 13-15, the simplest form of idolatry is worship of elements of nature; this does not entail the manufacture of artificial images, but involves the same mistaken confusion of the made for the Maker.

Disciple: Kindly explain the following to me clearly: what is the truth they did perceive? what more should they have known through that? what is the falsehood they struggled to establish through the (limited) truth they perceived?

Master: It is true that the sun and the stars shine brightly, and no one can deny that there is regularity of movement. The world does not fail to gain various benefits through them. But now you must learn what more can be grasped from this truth. The sun and the similar stars are perceptible objects, limited and created. That much we know.

[51] By analyzing created objects one must learn that they have a cause. Therefore, one who sees the sun and the stars must also know the truth that there is the Lord who is the creator of such things. It would be unreasonable instead to consider them to be the Lord. Struck by the brightness of such objects and the regularity of their movements, one must reason that there is the Lord who is their creator. It would be unreasonable to be so affected by a deceptive sense of wonder that one worships with rituals objects which were actually created by this Lord. Even if one is wonder-struck by the glory of such created objects, one should infer how much more glorious must be the Lord who sustains them. Such people are really ungrateful. The sun, the moon, and other stars are always active in service according to the Lord's will, and bestow very many benefits on the world. But people have forgotten the Lord who is the primary cause of all these things. They have given the primary place to things given us by the Lord, in preference to the Lord who gave these things to the world as a means to its benefit.

It is like this. Suppose you are sitting in darkness like a blind man. So that you can see and do your work, I set up in your house a very brilliant lamp made of gems. You see and wonder at the great brilliance of that lamp, and you do your work with the help of its light. But because of this you forget the giver of that light, and do all obeisance to a lamp made of gems, instead of doing obeisance and

other acts of respect to the giver of the light. Can such behavior be agreeable to reason and logic?

Disciple: One cannot doubt that it is disagreeable to reason and logic.

Master: Similarly, the merciful Lord fixed the wonderful sun and other stars in the heavenly firmament, the house of the world, like lamps made of gems, so that humans can do their work properly. **[52]** Moreover, for the good of humans the Lord and creator arranges it that the heavenly firmament, which is studded with the sun, moon, and other stars, will rotate over time in a more or less orderly way, so that days, months and years occur, and so that the world can live by various kinds of benefits derived from different seasons like spring. If this is the situation, humans must know the merciful Lord who gives so many beneficial things to the world. They should worship him with gratitude and be devoted to such a creator with all their strength. But to forget him and not pray to him and not trust him, instead worshipping the sun and the stars — all this is against reason and logic.

VI.3 The Worship of Material Things

Disciple: All this came about due to a lack of understanding, for it is against reason and logic. The mind doubtlessly cannot accept this with full consent, and cannot remain content with it. Tell me then what else is to be known on the subject of other religious viewpoints.

Master: Humans disgust the Lord due to the stain of sin and become unfit for his pure grace. They deserve to suffer in hell. Therefore, if a sinner does not emerge from this already accumulated sinfulness, given the general nature of sin he will only get more and more involved in a sinful life, and will not leave off the sinful acts he has already been committing. Therefore, when they are thinking carefully about God, as if not enough harm has been done already by unjustly considering the sun and other stars to be the Lord, they also consider other created things as various lords: e.g., the earth

trodden by humans and other animals, the ocean that houses fish, the water that quenches the thirst of humans and other animals, the fire that is helpful for the activities of humans such as cooking, etc., the air required for breathing. [53] They worship these with various rituals, image worship, etc., such as are owed instead to the Lord. Such is the great lack of understanding which results from the cruelty of excessive sin.

Disciple: Kindly tell me why humans fell into so deep a pit of deranged mindlessness.

Master: One should not be surprised if a blind man and those groping in utter darkness to find their way up and down might instead fall into various pits and suffer various kinds of evil deeds. To such people all that is evil comes easily on its own, and it will not be otherwise. So too, there is no need to be surprised that those whose minds are blinded and sinners float about in various types of falsehood and in the utter darkness of ignorance, falling more and more deeply into the pits of those various falsehoods. To a person with defective eyes, any little disturbance is enough reason for him to stumble and fall. So too, for those who are blind and lack knowledge of the Lord, the least excuse is enough for them to accept various falsehoods and then fall down.

The first reason why they stumble and fall by accepting what is false as the Lord is their thought that we live by food (alone). Following such people, many others too think that whatever is helpful for their lives is a god, and they worship it like a god. As a result, farmers who make their living ploughing the fields consider the plough and other implements to be gods. Barbers who earn their living by shaving consider the knife and other things as gods and worship them. The washerman who earns his living by washing clothing, saris, etc., worship the washing stone, etc., as deities. [54] Potters who live by making many pots out of mud, worship mud as god, and then they press it with their feet, kicking and mixing it, and they also worship the potter's wheel which is an instrument for their

work. Sculptors and others venerate their instruments of work as so many gods, since they use them in their respective professions.

The ignorant behavior of others too is ridiculous. For example, they worship the horse as a god, but then they ride it, beating it with the lash. They worship the elephant by smearing sandal paste on it and garlanding it, but then they ride it and cut it with the goad. As if this is not enough, in very many places they venerate various animals as their gods. In this way they praise all kinds of things with rituals proper to the Lord. In some places, they worship birds like the vulture; in other places, buffalos, bulls, and cows; in still other places, goats or wolves. In some kingdoms, dogs, rats, and frogs, many kinds of snakes, or other animal species, or trees like the peepal tree, etc., or their own servants, or weapons used for killing, the palanquin they climb on, a writing stylus which becomes blunted by constant use, and even the books in which they write their many falsehoods.

Thus they hold on to contradictory thoughts and worship these with worship due to the Lord alone. Such a lack of understanding occurs in humans due to the confusion of excessive sin. Although they are above these objects, since they do not know the Lord they blindly lower themselves beneath these objects which are actually harmful to them.

Disciple: In order to observe everything you have indicated, it is not necessary to go seek them in their respective places. One can see more or less all of them in my own place. Since my mind too had followed the blind people and I too danced with them blindly, [55] I feel very much ashamed of myself, and I greatly regret this in my heart. Teach me whatever else is to be taught about these false viewpoints.

Master: When I was explaining the reasons for the viewpoints described today, and how all this behavior is false, I was also showing that the first characteristic of the Lord's Veda is not present in them. Now in the Seventh Dialogue we shall explain in detail the

origins of the viewpoints that teach that the various idols are gods, and how truth is wanting in such views.

The Seventh Dialogue: Reasons for Idol Worship

VII.1 The Four Reasons for Idol Worship

Master: The views of those who worship various images are diverse.[51] Some make images out of gold, bronze and other metals, or out of stones, gems, and other precious stones. They bless them and make them sacred, and then they worship them, considering them to be God. Others do not consider the images to be God, but think that God has come to abide in the images in a special way, so they venerate them and praise them. A third group does not accept either of these views, but goes about it in yet another way. I.e., such people feel hesitant about saying that the immensely glorious Lord is a non-sentient image, and neither do they attempt to fit the transcendent-and-immanent Being, who is everywhere fully present and who exceeds everything, into an image. But they still consider the image a sign by which they can praise and venerate the invisible God.

A fourth group does not say that the many images and the created objects like the sun, etc., are the transcendent-and-immanent Being, but considers them rather to be pleasing to the transcendent-and-immanent Being. According to this view, if you worship the

[51] de Nobili here begins to outline a theory of idolatry, traceable to Aquinas and back further in the tradition. Aquinas amply explains his theory of idolatry in the *Summa theologiae* II.II.93. The concept of idolatry was widely used by the early Jesuit scholars to categorize and explain the religions they encountered in Asia and the Americas. The most common word de Nobili uses for the images of the gods is *vigraha*, which can indicate simply some kind of form of embodiment, without any pejorative sense. Since de Nobili is of two minds about images — they are wrong only when they somehow replace or misrepresent God — at times *vigraha* will mean simply "image," and at other times it will mean "idol;" so too, the proper understanding and veneration of images is distinguished from idol-worship. We have therefore had to vary our translation, sometimes using "image" and sometimes "idol."

images it is pleasing to God and equal to worshipping God himself, so they tolerate the practice. In order to understand clearly how all these viewpoints do not agree with the truth but rather are false, **[56]** it will be very useful to know how they came about.

The main reason may be that the Veda revealed by the Lord did not remain very close to everybody; this absence was the primary cause for many viewpoints that came to be mixed with falsehood. But apart from this cause, there are very many particular reasons why false viewpoints came to be close to everybody. The following are special reasons behind the worship of idols: 1. power, 2. grief, 3. wonder, and 4. affection.

Disciple: There is a well-known popular saying, "Make it intelligible by making it brief." You have listed four special reasons why false viewpoints arose. In order to make it still clearer, though, explain them to me one by one. First, how did power become a cause for the false images?

VII.2 First Reason for Idol Worship: Power

Master: In some countries kings ruled the people with great pride and harshness. They conquered many countries and subjected many people to themselves. The people praised them, "O hail!" Out of fear and in order to survive they attributed to the kings an imaginary greatness which they did not possess. As a result, the kings' minds were deluded by pride and they became more and more proud; they came to consider themselves greater than humans, even though they were just like the other ordinary human beings. Confused with ignorance, these kings became worse each day; instead of concealing (their vanity) in their minds, they threw over all reasonable (boundaries). Demented by pride, they wanted people to think of them as they thought of themselves, so they declared that all the rituals done for God must be done for them. **[57]** Not content with such a blunder, the kings made images of themselves so that people would consider them gods of this world and praise them as such. They called such images gods, created (altar-like) platforms and placed the images on them, and instructed the people

to make offerings and perform for the images those acts of worship, etc., which are meant for God. Thus too they created festivals for them, and also provided many desirable and pleasant items as food for the crowds. In this way they used power to establish themselves as gods.

In those days the people were subject to these rulers, and obeyed this unjust teaching out of fear and as a means of survival under such kings. Moreover, talented poets wrote many works pleasing to these kings, with various figurative embellishments. In these works they called the kings gods and sang their praises, saying that these kings had taken human form in order to protect the world.[52] They praised them in this way, exaggerating their valor and greatness; they wrote many fictitious stories which they named "divine play."[53] In order that successive generations might fmnly believe in such fictitious works, they proclaimed them to be obligatory works revealed by God, which great sages had uttered and various other seers passed down, etc.

Disciple: How can one prove that such works were proclaimed neither by sages nor by God?

Master: It is not difficult for an intelligent person to figure this out. One who admits God's existence must also admit that all goodness is present in God by nature and in abundance. This God will teach only virtues like truth, etc., and commandments proper to this purpose, so that the world can live righteously. He will not teach false sayings, useless sports and lustful deeds. One must admit this. If one examines these literary works without deception or partiality, **[58]** one will see in them obvious lies, useless stories,

[52] I.e., in acts of compassion like the divine descents (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu.

[53] I.e., describing divine figures freely enjoying themselves in actions which are like play to them (*līlā*, *viḷaiyāṭaḷ*:). It is common in Hindu theology to describe at least some divine actions as "play," emphasizing both the enjoyment of this kind of action, and also the utter lack of compulsion.

and behavior that leads to sin. One should therefore conclude that such mythological works could not have been revealed by God.

It is also not reasonable to call seers and sages such people lacking in knowledge of the transcendent-and-immanent Being. (True seers and sages) must be devoted to the righteousness that is truth. Knowing God who is truth by nature is the primary cause for the righteousness that is truth. If these people are lacking in such knowledge of God, it is not right to call them devotees of the righteousness that is truth. Rather, one must admit that the authors of these works are ignorant of God, since they tell various lies when they talk about God's nature, analyze how he is the cause of everything, and explain these points. Since they have no knowledge of the Lord, one cannot call them true devotees of righteousness. Therefore, it is in name alone, and in no other way, that they could be called seers and sages.

Disciple: It is proper to accept as true what you have said about the works that teach various gods. It is also well-known here that some kings have made themselves into gods. King Hiraṇya commanded that apart from himself no other God was to be worshipped. The people under his rule worshipped him as God for some time. If anyone even mentioned another God instead of worshipping him, such a person's tongue would be cut out.[54]

Various falsehoods were also mixed into this well-known story. Hiraṇyakaśipu is said have received several favors, including that he would die "neither here nor there." But one god came as a lion and killed Hiraṇya, drank his blood and then started destroying this world in the fury of his anger. But just then another god came in the

[54] Hiraṇya (or Hiraṇyakaśipu) is a well-known demon and king from Hindu mythology, e.g., from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. I.e., Hiraṇya had been promised that he would not be killed by man or beast, Lord Viṣṇu descends into the world as a man-lion — thus being neither man nor beast, but both.

form of a bird called Śarabha **[59]** and threw the god born as a lion up into the sky and quenched its fury.[55]

Such fictions cannot be accepted, since they contradict reason.[56] But it can be accepted as true that Hiraṇya was ruling and had himself worshipped as a god. As you said, here and there have been many kings who made themselves gods by their power. In this area it was king Hiraṇya who made himself a god by his power. It seems to be quite reasonable to believe this.

Master: You have spoken reasonably and sorted out fact and fiction in the story of Hiraṇya; as you explained, it illustrates how some idols came into existence through power. The bee sits on both the flowers that are sweet and those that are sour, but it then leaves aside the sour and collects only the essence of the sweet flowers. Similarly, when an intelligent person listens to stories that are mixtures of fact and fiction and reflects on them, he must reasonably examine the sweet truth, which must be accepted in faith, but also the sour fiction, which must be left aside.

In addition, some kings created images and established themselves as gods through power exploited in other ways. E.g., many rich people are like kings in the world. When elders in their families, their fathers, etc., died, they thought that the deceased had become gods, so they erected images, built temples for them, and conducted many different festivals. Talented poets sang hymns about them and flattered them with glories which they did not possess. Among the people of that time some were intelligent and died, but were not considered to be gods; yet works were composed in praise of them as a sign of courtesy. This much people could recognize, **[60]** but when the (original) generation is gone and

[55] In the Śaiva version of the narrative, the man-lion is then destroyed by Śiva who for this purpose takes on the form of a great bird, Śarabha.

[56] de Nobili dismisses the account in all its versions where the gods become involved. He identifies Hiraṇya as an evil human king who imposed worship of himself on his subjects.

several generations have passed, people then see only the temples, images, the prayers and worship conducted daily, and all the festivals celebrated there, and they will not remember that these people were only humans who committed various sins and died. The later generations likewise will not know that great poets, in keeping with their usual natures, wrote their works about the deceased only out of courtesy. They may think that what these poets wrote actually took place, and on that basis may therefore accept the deceased as gods, as divine descents,[57] and therefore venerate and praise them.

VII.3 An Alternative View of the Origins of Idolatry in Power

Disciple: All this too is customary here. After various kings and lords died, their descendants built temples for them, instituted festivals, and worshipped them with ritual oblations. Great poets composed many works about them, just to earn their livelihood. As you said, people living a hundred years later would not have seen these dead people, and they would not know that the works about the deceased were written our of courtesy, with poetic imagination. When they look at the temples, the traditionally celebrated festivals, image worship, and acts of reverence, they think that the deceased really were the transcendent-and-immanent Being. Without knowing that the works about them were written out of courtesy with poetic imagination, they will believe that these works record what truly happened.

We can also note how the present generation behaves. When statues are erected and new temples built for people who died in our own time, the present generation does not care about them, since they have seen the deceased and know their sinful deeds. But thereafter, one or two hundred years later, the people will consider them to be God, observing the image worship conducted according

[57] "Divine descent" (*avatāra*) or, literally, simply "descent." The idea is that certain persons are embodiments of the divine, God descended in human form.

to the tradition. [61] When the present generation of people see only the temples built for dead kings and lords, along with the customs of traditionally conducted image worship and ritual oblations, unlike the people of earlier time who actually knew them they venerate and praise them as many gods. This shows that even without the kings of this area using force, all of this happens.

Master: Do not say that. When a king erects an image for his deceased father, builds a temple, and conducts acts of worship and festivals, the people under his rule cannot avoid worshipping it, because they are dependent on him. Just the fact that the king goes near the image made by him and performs rituals proper to God there is tantamount to forcing the people who live by his favor to worship that image. The way a king behaves is a model and command that other people must follow, and this too can be said to be a kind of power. Moreover, even if there was no such force exerted at the beginning, as time passes this traditionally conducted worship becomes a rule all the people are forced to follow.

VII.4 Second Reason for Idol Worship: Grief

Disciple: We have learned how some images originated in the world due to the exercise of power. But you also mentioned that some images come to be worshipped in the world through grief. How does this happen?

Master: Since people who do not know God do not analyze the truth, they are liable to imitate various false customs. Justice and truth are not authoritative for the behavior of ignorant people, [62] so the powerful are capable of teaching behavior which lacks true and just authority, however they wish.

Some chiefs and lords who lost their children were not able to bear the suffering they experienced in their great sorrow, because the children died young. In order to remove this grief, they thought that their dead children had become gods; they made images of them, and praised them with rituals such as idol worship, etc. The people subject to leaders imitate them. Not only do they venerate the

deceased children of their masters, but when their own children die people make images and perform rituals in the same way, to get over their grief. Even if this was done at the beginning for other motives, as time passes evil custom ripens; as it matures, the practice becomes an unavoidable obligation.[58]

Disciple: One can see more or less the same thing here. Some people make images of their dead children and perform image worship and have celebrations for them. One can observe this in yet another unreasonable activity. Images are made and image worship and other acts of veneration performed even for various sinners, e.g., for a thief who was hanged, or one killed in loneliness, or a lord who died by cruelly hurting himself, or those who commit suicide by voluntarily and unreasonably jumping into fires.[59]

But tell me now how some idols came to be venerated out of wonder.

Master: We shall speak in the Eighth Dialogue about how, in ancient times and places, some idols arose in the world due to wonder.

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[58] For a similar but earlier Jesuit view of the relationship between reverence for deceased relatives and idolatry, see the comment of Alessandro Valignano as cited by Josef Franz Schutte, S.J., *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan*, Volume II, p. 82: "...to assuage their sense of loss, relatives erected monuments or sculptured figures to their beloved dead to serve as living images of them. They caused their servants and subjects, too, to pay honor to these memorials as though the departed were still in their midst. Later generations no longer understood the true significance of such representations; they believed that a divinity dwelt in them and so regarded them as divine."

[59] I.e., virtuous wives, (*sati*) being immolated in their husbands' funeral pyres.

The Eighth Dialogue: Reasons for Idol Worship (continued)

VIII.1 Third Reason for Idol Worship: Wonder

[63] Disciple: You have said that wonder is a cause for the origin of some idols in the world. Kindly explain to me how this is so.

Master: Those devoted to knowledge say that whatever seems wondrous is actually born of ignorance. If we see something special in one place, which is not seen anywhere else, we wonder what it is, since we do not know about it. When we wonder about something without knowing what it is, mistakes can occasionally occur in analyzing it. Thus when people in ancient times saw in one place a power not present anywhere else, they wondered at it, unable to decipher what it was. Some among them, ignorant about God, were not only amazed, but also established as a god an object which does not have power at all. For they got lost in analyzing the object they wondered about, without fully understanding it.

When dull-witted people saw around them in the world people of great strength, or people of very acute intelligence, they were astonished at them. They decided that such glorious people must be gods descended into the world, not human beings like others. So they built images and temples for them, and began to venerate and praise them, performing rituals due to God.

Disciple: It is understandable that humans wondered at great and intelligent people from earlier years and established them as gods. Even at present people accept intelligent people as divine descents. Thus, for example, within the past forty or fifty years we had among us Ànandabhaṭṭa and Vaikuṇṭabhaṭṭa of Toṇṭamaṇṭaḷam who are still remembered by people in our time as being very intelligent. They were endowed with minds more acute than those of most people in their day, **[64]** so people considered them not ordinary human beings, but rather divine descents. They erected

images for both of them, and also built temples. (Even today) they are worshipped as divine descents by the people.

Master: In this too their lack of intelligence becomes clear. They made images of both these men, and as a result end up worshipping yet more idols, as if to prove, "God has a maker!"

VIII.2 Criticism of the Myths of Rāma and Cokkanāta [Śiva]

One can point out a similar lack of understanding in other places too. For instance, people called Rāma "God" and yet also established that this "God" has a maker. For this reason Rāmeśvaram is in use today.[60] Similarly, Cokkanāta[61] was called God, but this "God" worships another image, the image called "The one who grants good to the world."[62] Even if all this is said to be "sport," and even if it is said that the god's worship of this other god is meant only to demonstrate how people should worship, still, we assert, those who worship in this way cannot themselves be God.

Disciple: Kindly explain how this can be.

Master: When Rāma killed Rāvaṇa, by doing so, they say, he became guilty of a great murder. In order to expiate the guilt of this murder, Rāma worshipped an image (of Śiva), as a traditional account about this place tells us. But if one carefully analyses this, it

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60 The following sections refer to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the epic story of prince Rāma who was exiled to the forest, where his wife Sitā was kidnapped. Rāma had to defeat the king of Sri Lanka, RāvaÑa, in battle, in order to get her back; in expiation for killing Rāvaṇa who, though a demon, was also a brahmin, Rāma worshipped Śiva at Rameśvaram on the coast of Tamil Nadu, where even today a grand temple stands. It is not unheard of in Hindu mythology that even gods, and great Gods, have to perform expiations for their sins and, on occasion, bow down to one another.

61 Cokkanāta — "the handsome lord" — is the familiar name of Śiva at the great Minaksi temple in Madurai, where de Nobili lived; below, de Nobili assumes that Cokkanāta too is a wicked human king.

62 This seems to be an inscription on a statue known to de Nobili.

becomes clear that this story cannot be accepted by reasonable people. If Rāma, who is God, kills the sinner Rāvaṇa, one cannot say that God is guilty of murder. Anyone can see that this would be a blatant lie. If we say that the creator of all is guilty of murder when he destroys sinners, **[65]** then we would have to admit that God is guilty of endless crimes, since often sinners and those who indulge in unrighteousness die according to God's command. One cannot accept such a lie as true.

Therefore, if Rāma is God, Rāma's killing the wicked Rāvaṇa could not be considered a crime, and there is no doubt that to say so would be a falsehood, contradictory to reason. Moreover, it is only right that the almighty God should punish and kill sinners in this world. Such deeds of justice are righteous, and cannot be considered sin. A deed is said to be a sin only if it is an unreasonable act which contradicts justice. Therefore, if one says that Rāma is guilty of murder, one also has to admit that Rāma committed an act of injustice. But one who commits such an act of injustice cannot be said to be the Lord who is just. To claim this would be unreasonable.

Disciple: Some argue that it was only out of sport[63] that Rāma appeared like one committing murder, whereas in truth he is not guilty of murder at all. How should we understand this?

Master: A falsehood is always a falsehood, however much one turns it around. One must admit either that Rāma is guilty of murder, or that through sport he feigned a crime of which he was not guilty. If he did commit the crime of murder, he is not God. If he feigned a crime of which he was not guilty, merely out of sport, then he is guilty of falsehood. But if there is falsehood in him, it is not right to say that he is the transcendent-and-immanent Being whose proper form is truth.

[63] I.e., Rāma chose freely to take on this appearance of guilt, without compulsion and (probably) without suffering.

Disciple: Some say that Rāma worshipped Cokkanāta in order to exemplify how one is to worship that image in the world. How should this be answered?

Master: Even so we must still say that Rāma is not God. For the worshipper must be less than the one he worships. Therefore, if Rāma is said to have worshipped someone else in some way or another, Rāma must be said to be a lower being than the one he worshipped. **[66]** But a Rāma who is lower than someone else cannot be the transcendent-and-immanent Being who is the creator of all. To say so would be far from the truth.

So too, if Cokkanāta worshipped the image named "The one who grants good to the world," it cannot be true to say that Cokkanāta is God. The Lord is by nature endowed with all goodness, and one cannot say that even an iota of goodness is lacking to him. If nothing is lacking to him, it would not be proper to say that someone else could grant him the good, as if he could receive the good from someone else. Therefore, if Cokkanāta has a god called "The one who grants good to the world," we must say that someone else grants the good to Cokkanāta, and that Cokkanāta receives the good from someone else. Therefore, Cokkanāta is lacking in perfect goodness and cannot be called God, since God is by nature all good. Thus, if the image named, "The one who grants good to the world" is capable of granting the good to Cokkanāta, the one who receives this good must be lacking in goodness and cannot be called the Lord of all, who is all good.

Disciple: Some say that Cokkanāta does possess all goodness, but that in sport he worshipped the image, and only seemed to be deficient in goodness.

Master: If this is so, we must still say there is falsehood in him, and that in addition to possessing falsehood, he also confuses people and prevents them from knowing God.

Disciple: How is that? Please tell me.

Master: One cannot say that God has a creator. Therefore, one who shows in some way or another that God has a creator **[67]** can be said to prevent humans from knowing God. To suggest that the Lord who is by nature all good is lacking in goodness, or to suggest that someone else could grant goodness to the Lord, is to produce in humans an ignorance which prevents them from coming to know God. Therefore, if Cokkanāta is the Lord, it must be shown to the world that he has no creator, that nothing is lacking in his goodness, and that no one is granting him that goodness. When, on the contrary, Cokkanāta worshipped the image entitled, "The one who grants good to the world," this clearly shows the world that Cokkanāta has a creator, and that there is something lacking in his goodness such that he could receive the good from someone else. In other words, Cokkanāta created confusion and made humans fall into ignorance so that the world would not realize that God has no creator and that he does not lack in goodness. It would be a great blasphemy to imagine and assert that all these flaws could be present in the Lord, since the Lord is truth by nature and will not make it appear that he has a creator or that he lacks in something. Therefore, the moment Rāma and Cokkanāta worshipped someone else, it was established that they had another creator, and that it is not reasonable to call either of them God.

Disciple: People also explain this differently: i.e., it is said that the images worshipped by Rāma and Cokkanāta were not different from themselves, so they were actually worshipping themselves.

VIII.3 The Meaning of Mythological Figures

Master: As mentioned above, whichever way the falsehood is turned, it cannot hide its true character. To anyone who analyzes correctly, a falsehood will always be a falsehood, not anything else. If Rāma worships the *liṇgam*[64] but is himself the *liṇgam*, and if Cokkanāta worships the *liṇgam* but is himself the *liṇgam*, then Rāma and Cokkanāta must be one and the same reality. **[68]** For if two things are identical with one form, both must be the same thing.

[64] The *liṇgam* is the phallic pillar which represents Śiva in his aniconic form.

If you observe the traditional way of understanding these gods, then one cannot say that Rāma and Cokkanāta are identical. For example, out of mutual enmity they attack each other with weapons; each searches for the other without knowing [where he is]. Such activities are possible only between two people who are different, not otherwise. If the two were identical, as was said, and if the difference is only in name, then since Cokkanāta as Rāma committed the crime of murder (and thereafter worshipped Cokkanāta), one must say that Rāma worshipped himself.

To understood everything in this way, one would have to accept many contradictory falsehoods. I.e., one would have to admit that the Lord did many useless things which were also untrue: God committed the crime of murder; he created falsehood by appearing to be guilty when he was not; he made it appear that he had a creator when actually he had no creator; he made it appear that there is someone else who grants him the good even though he himself is all good. Nor is it intelligible to say that he should worship himself; it is foolish to say that something is greater than itself, and without a doubt it is also false to say that something can worship itself.

It is foolish too to maintain that someone worshipped himself in order to teach people. If a person did order the whole world to venerate his image, he would be indicating that everyone should venerate that image. But it would be unreasonable to worship one's own image, erected by oneself. Similarly, people who are subject to a king will normally show their respect through salutation and other rituals, when they see the seal of the king or his other signs. But the king himself will not worship the image he erected as his own memorial. **[69]** Therefore, it is not proper for Rāma and Cokkanāta to worship some images as themselves. Therefore, from the arguments presented above, Rāma and Cokkanāta can not be the Lord, since they worshipped images of themselves.

VIII.4 The Real Meaning of the Worship of Rāma and Śiva

Disciple: It is established that such beings are not the Lord. But who are they then? How are we to understand them?

Master: As mentioned above, wonder is responsible for the veneration of some images as God in the world. Kings in their respective countries enjoyed great fame and lived in great wealth and splendor. The common people looked at them with wonder. Dull-witted, the people considered such kings not merely as human beings, but as the Lord's descents, and so they erected images for them. Similarly, when people saw bright objects like the sun, etc., that were created by the Lord, they wondered at them and considered them to be God, because they did not know who God is. Since they wanted these objects before their eyes at all times, and since they desired to praise and venerate by various rituals those whom in their wonder they regarded as gods, they made images of them.

Moreover, these foolish people thought, in a confused way, that God is like themselves: that the gods, like themselves, have their own wives, that they have great attachment towards these wives and are unable to be separate from them and therefore hold these wives on their laps, keep them on their hips, carry them on their heads, hold them on their chests, etc. Thus people speak in unreasonable ways. Although they are speaking about the nature of God the creator of all, who is immensely merciful, who is the cause of everything, who is the most perfect of all things, **[70]** they write all kinds of foolish falsehoods, and they even attribute to God revolting behavior and activities that are unbecoming even to base people. They make God, who is above all things, the lowest among lascivious people.

Disciple: In order to find an excuse for this, people say that God did all this as sport.

Master: It is not difficult to prove that such activities cannot be attributed to God, even if counted as sport. For one sees in these activities a lack of understanding mixed with falsehood and filled with lustful deeds. Anyone who is reasonable and afraid of blame will not dare to attribute such sports to the eternal Lord.

Disciple: What you have explained is indeed acceptable, and there is no need to speak at length to prove this. Any reasonable person who analyzes without prejudice all that you have said will not reject it. So this much suffices. But, finally, tell me how some images originated due to affection.

Master: Today's discourse has gone on too long. Therefore, we shall reply to what you are asking in the Ninth Dialogue.

The Ninth Dialogue: Reasons for Idol Worship (concluded)

IX.1 Fourth Reason for Idol Worship: Affection

Disciple: You have explained how various images originated in the world due either to power, suffering, or wonder. But in the Seventh Dialogue you said that some idols came into existence out of affection. Kindly explain this point.

IX.2 The Contributions of Practical and Theoretical Learning to Society

Master: We said that various idols came into existence through power, sorrow, or wonder. **[71]** Similarly, we can say that affection too is responsible for the origin of idols, for the following reasons.

In various places, there were notable people of good will and good qualities. They were capable of handling various skills, and did many good things for their respective places. People knew the benefits to themselves because of such people. They had great respect for such great people and were grateful. In order that they

should remain always famous, and that their descendants not forget about them, people erected various images in their name after their deaths, saying that they had become divine. They started venerating the images erected for them, at first in the same way as they were honored earlier while alive. But the respect and honor given to them out of affection at the beginning increased in course of time; gradually, over a long period of time and out of sheer ignorance, people started saying that they were the transcendent-and-immanent Being, and no longer remembered that these were merely images erected in their names after death. They began to honor them with image worship and other rituals proper to the transcendent-and-immanent Being alone.

Disciple: You said that it was out of people's ignorance that some people came to be treated as God, since they did various favors for the rest. Kindly tell me who they were and what favors they did for the world.

[72] **Master:** We said that by doing various favors for society some people came to be called gods. After we know the kinds of favors they did, we shall mention their names together, according to their respective places. They became gods in different places because of different sciences. Such sciences are of two kinds; some are practical and others are theoretical.

Disciple: Kindly explain to me "practical science" and "theoretical science."[65]

IX.3 Two Kinds of Learning

Master: Some sciences teach practical activities. For example, certain sciences teach various kinds of cultivation, how to undertaken agriculture, etc. These sciences are called practical sciences, e.g., the sciences related to sculpture, archery, music, medicine, and related sciences. In these sciences one is taught how

[65] Respectively *sakarma śāstra* (learning connected to action) and *akarma śāstra* (learning unconnected to action).

to build painting halls, etc.; how to fight with weapons like the bow, etc.; how to sing with the proper notes, and how to heal different sicknesses with different medicines. Practical skills are taught in the above mentioned sciences, and that is why they are called "the practical sciences."

Disciple: What is theoretical science?

Master: Scholars call "theoretical" those sciences which deal with astrology, with the nature of the world, and with the ultimate knowledge which makes known the transcendent-and-immanent Being and other higher things.

[73] **Disciple:** Why do they speak of them in these terms?

Master: Even if a certain activity is prescribed, the proper nature of the various objects involved is also made known. These sciences are called theoretical sciences because they specify consciousness by revealing the nature of the respective objects. In this way they aid consciousness, but they do not teach other practical activities. Such sciences are called theoretical sciences because their knowledge lies solely in this formation of consciousness.

Both theoretical and practical sciences are needed in the world which would no doubt be poorer without them, so the founders of such sciences have done a great favor to the world. When such favors are done, the founders of these sciences in their respective places, along with those who taught the sciences, were held in great honor by the citizens of those places. In addition to honoring them, the people of later generations erected images for them in order that their fame should always continue. They began to venerate those images themselves, just as the men had been honored in earlier days. In the course of time, such images were increasingly venerated by people who had no knowledge of transcendent-and-immanent Being, and finally (they became) idols and came to be called gods. Some people praised and worshipped these images with the rituals, worship, etc., that are proper to God. Even though not everyone called these people honored by images "gods," still they continued

to perform for them the rituals and worship which should have proper to God alone.

The people's ignorance has increased very much, and no one need doubt that it is against reason and logic to believe, due to a confusion of identity, that what is not God is God. [74] But to accept, out of ignorance, what is not God as God, and to worship such objects with image worship and other forms of veneration which are proper to God, is like walking without a lamp and falling into a well. But those who knowingly accept as God what is not God and venerate and praise such objects with worship proper to God alone are the greater sinners — they are like those who fall into a well while walking along holding a lamp in their hand.

IX.4 Society's Debt to Great Authors

Disciple: What you have said is in fact quite accurate. When one observes carefully what is going on here, it is clear that the people of this place erected images for the authors of various books and called those authors gods. Thus, the one who wrote the *Āgama Grantha* was called the Great God (Mahādeva).[66] They do not call the person who wrote a commentary on grammatical science a man, but rather a divine descent.[67] People also call the author of the *Bhagavad Gītā* God.[68] Various images were thus erected for the various authors of different treatises who were then called God.

Moreover, great experts in various disciplines are also called great seers. Although they are not called God, they are still

[66] Texts of the Śaiva religious tradition; Mahādeva (the "Great God") is Śiva.

[67] I.e., an *avatāra*.

[68] The *Bhagavad Gītā* is one of the most famous of Hindu texts; it is the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and a human warrior, Arjuna. de Nobili understands Kṛṣṇa to be the author of the *Gītā*, a historical person later worshipped as a deity. Other Christian apologists instead portrayed Kṛṣṇa as a strictly mythological figure. While many Hindus stress Kṛṣṇa's transcendent status and traditionally let pass the question of history, once the question of historical identity is raised, they usually insist that Kṛṣṇa was a real, historical person.

venerated by the people of this place with worship and other rituals proper to God. Thus, the sage Vyāsa[69] is worshipped; although the twelve āḻvārs of the Vaiṣṇava tradition,[70] Śaṅkara of the Advaita tradition,[71] and many recognized teachers are not called God, they are all worshipped as if there were no difference between them and God. One therefore has to admit that what you said is right.

Master: The authors of systematic treatises did a favor to the world through their knowledge, but due to ignorance the people call them gods. [75] Similarly, other people are worshipped with rituals, image worship, etc., since they too contributed various good things to the world. In some places, those who taught skills, such as skill in a certain art, are worshipped. So too, there are many kings who ruled the people and looked after them very well and did a great many favors in their respective places; the citizens of those nations loved them very much and erected images for them in order that they might be always remembered. They just honored them, but a long time afterwards later generations started worshipping them as gods.

Disciple: This is exactly what is happening here too. This is why people worship the image of the Pāṇḍyan king Cokkanāta as God. Many other such kings are also worshipped as God in their respective places. Therefore, it is proven that affection is a fourth cause for the origin of numerous idols.

But kindly tell me whether there are any other reasons for the origin of idols.

IX.5 Other Reasons for Idolatry

Master: The four causes mentioned by us thus far should be considered the primary reasons for the origin of idols. But there is no doubt that apart from these four, there may be other reasons for

[69] Vyāsa is a sage to whom many great scriptures and the epic *Mahābhārata* are attributed.

[70] The āḻvārs were saint poets devoted to Viṣṇu, writing poetry in Tamil, between the 6th and 9th centuries.

[71] Śaṇkara was the greatest theologian of the Advaita (nondualist) Vedānta tradition.

the origin of idols which are special to certain places. Such reasons will be known to people of those places, and there is no need to enumerate them.

But there is no doubt that it is a great sin to worship as God images which were created due to the above mentioned four reasons. Similarly, it is a sin and unreasonable to worship images as God for other reasons too. E.g., in ancient times there was a woman who was worshipped as a goddess, **[76]** and the reason for this was that she is said to have taught women in different places the profession of prostitution, i.e., of making love to men other than their husbands.

Disciple: One can see such cases here too. There is even a science in use here which explains the nature of such behavior. They say that it was written by God and taught to the world by great persons and well-known teachers of great rank. Manmatha is the author of the *Kāmaśāstra* and he is venerated with proper worship. There is also a work called *Amaruk*,[72] and it is a primary cause for lust, the ugliest of sins. It should not even be mentioned since it is unfit even to hear; it is repugnant to the mind and filled with the revolting desires of lust. The author of this work is identified with Śaṅkara the great sage and teacher, and people worship his image in north India.

Master: All this behavior is the result of the confusion caused by sin. Sinners were not satisfied with spoiling numerous people by their bad behavior, so they also wrote works which teach sinful things and so mislead later generations too. After considering the harmful reasoning which these people inflict on the world, one should bum their works and forget their names. To study their works with respect and to venerate and praise them is behavior born of ignorance, nothing else.

[72] Amaru is the legendary author of a collection of one hundred erotic verses, the *Amaruśaṭakam*.

IX.6 The Proper Understanding of Images as Symbols

Disciple: If there is anything more that I should learn regarding the origin of images, kindly teach me.

Master: Some people have taught that images are symbols of God by way of "secondary meaning." In the course of time, due to lack of understanding **[77]**, people were unable to grasp this point with their limited intelligence, so they concluded that the transcendent-and-immanent Being is present in those images by its reflection.

Disciple: I do not understand these images that are explained with respect to "secondary meaning." Kindly explain this to me in detail.

Master: The image of an object can be explained in two ways. The image is made either to show the visible form of the object or its symbolic form.[73]

Disciple: What is an image which is made to show an object's visible form?

Master: Sometimes images are made according to the form of the object. Thus, if an image is made for the human body, the image will present all of the human body, its head and other parts. One who sees the image will say that just as the image has hands, legs, and other parts, so too the human body has all these parts. Such images show the form of the object, so they are called images which show the visible form, images indicating the form. One who looks at such images will conclude that the objects for which such images are made have the same measure and same parts.

Disciple: If the transcendent-and-immanent Being possesses a body like us, it must be a created being. I have heard you say many

[73] The visible form is the *rūpa*; the symbolic form is the *lakṣaṇa*. This latter term would be well-known in Indian texts dealing with aesthetics, as pertaining to several kinds of indirect or implied meaning and rperesentation.

times that God is not embodied. If so, it seems to me that one cannot establish an image of God which indicates God's visible form.

[78] Master: What you say is true. This kind of image is made for an object which possesses a body with multiple parts. Whether this image is painted or made out of other materials, its object can be recognized as itself. Since its object is visible and possesses various characteristics, the image must possess the visible form of the object. If the image is of the kind that indicates a visible form, its object must be seen to possess a visible form with those various characteristics. Such an object can only be a limited being.

But the transcendent-and-immanent Being cannot be seen with the bodily eye, since it does not possess a body and since it exists of itself, is indivisible, and has no parts. This being cannot be represented by a visible form. If one were to maintain that the transcendent-and-immanent Being could be shown by an image of the type suited to the form of a visible object, this would mean that the transcendent-and-immanent Being too would have a body like ours and (as bodily) would be created. As you say, then, there is no doubt that it is illogical and unreasonable to say that one could make an image of the type which represents a visible form for the transcendent-and-immanent Being.

IX.7 Symbols

Disciple: From your explanation I have understood the kind of image which indicates a visible form. Now tell me about the kind of image which represents something symbolically.

Master: One can begin by saying that in painting, etc., an image is a statement uttered without syllables, a book for illiterate people.

Disciple: Kindly explain to me how this is so.

Master: A statement expresses with syllables what an object is. In painting, etc., an image can be called a statement without syllables.

[79] Listen carefully now to what this is about. If one has to explain through words how the human body will be of this or that form, then it is through syllables that one will have to explain what a head is, what it is to have parts like eyes, etc., how it is that hands, legs and other parts will be of such and such a type, and how it is that the human body is an object which possesses such parts properly. Such an explanation is given in syllables, and it will make the human body known.

But images made in painting, etc., also make all these things known. One who sees the painting of a human body will understand that the head will be like this, and that hands, legs, and other parts fit into each other properly; one can conclude that this is the human body. This is why we said that images made by painting, etc., are statements uttered without syllables. One who is able to read can know all of this through books. Similarly, though, one who cannot read will know all of this by means of the images made in paintings, etc. Therefore, images made in paintings, etc., are books for those who cannot read.

Disciple: According to you then an image made by painting is equal to words. But what do we learn from saying that an image made by painting, etc., is equal to words?

Master: Even if the images made by painting, etc., are equal to words, nevertheless one must understand these images in different ways, just as words are understood in various ways.

Disciple: Kindly teach me how this is so.

Master: Words are of many kinds. We group together two kinds of words (which differ) according to their use in a given context. **[80]** Sometimes words reveal the form of an object. E.g., if I say, "A tree consists of branches, a trunk, leaves, flowers and fruit," this will indicate the form of the tree which is the object. Likewise, an image made by painting, etc., in the way mentioned before, will also reveal the form of that object.

But sometimes a statement will say one thing and make something else known, without describing the form of the object. E.g., I might say, "The king is the sun in the sky. His commander-in-chief is a lion among men," or, looking at a handsome person, I might say, "His face is the moon." Such statements surely do not reveal the form of the object. After examining the meaning of statements about the king, his commander-in-chief, and the beautiful face, one will not actually call them "sun," "lion," and "moon." Such statements do not express the visible forms of the objects as they are. But in order to point out something in the object, something else is stated. I.e., in order to point out that the king shines with great brilliance, that he is above other humans, and that others survive due to this king, and to make other similar points about the king, it is said, "The king is the world's sun." In order to show that the commander-in-chief is a great hero among soldiers, or that another man is handsome, about the first it is said, "He is a lion," while about the latter it is said, "His face is the moon." In these cases the statement says one thing but symbolically points out something else.

So too, sometimes an image made by painting, etc., does not point to the visible form of an object, but instead symbolically reveals one thing through something else.

Disciple: Kindly explain this in detail, so that I can understand it.

[81] Master: Some objects do not possess a body with various bodily characteristics, so one cannot make images of such objects by painting, etc., so as to represent their forms. Just as words can say one thing but point to something else, so too in painting, etc., images may present one thing but point to something else. For example, the virtue of justice bestows rewards on good people and punishes sinners; it consists of granting rewards or punishments according to the righteousness of each. But since this virtue has no body with a head, legs, or other parts, justice cannot be presented as a visible body depicted in a picture. There is no doubt about this.

Therefore, when painting an image, etc., in order to illustrate the virtue of justice, wise people portray one thing in the picture but are really pointing out something else, revealing how justice is to be understood. Thus, a woman's picture is painted; in her right hand there is a weapon, while in her left hand she holds a scale. In this way they indicate the virtue of justice by a picture, but it does not mean that justice is a woman, just because in the picture justice is portrayed by a woman holding a weapon and a scale.

Disciple: What is being shown by this form pictured in this way?

Master: It is meant to show that by its nature the virtue of justice rewards the good and punishes the wicked, each according to what he deserves. Therefore, justice is depicted in the picture holding a weapon in one hand and a balance in another.

Disciple: Why is it that justice is shown in the form of a woman?[74]

[82] Master: In ordinary life a man who is married to a virtuous woman is very fond of her and lives without separating himself from her even for a short time. So too humans should choose the virtue of justice and become attached to justice, and should not give up justice even for a short time. That is why justice is presented in the picture as a woman.

Justice, mercy, and other virtues must be treated similarly; to show this, mercy and the other virtues too are depicted in the form of a woman. According to the nature of the virtue depicted, one can present it with different characteristics. Thus, mercy is presented in the form of a woman showing favor to many children, since the virtue of mercy, as we know, consists in protecting the poor as a mother might protect her children through favors of food, etc.

[74] This is apparently not an Indian image, but one drawn from the European context.

Moreover, in Sanskrit and some other languages, justice, mercy, and other virtues are nouns in the feminine gender.[75] In this way you can understand why such virtues are depicted in the form of a woman.

Disciple: Here too people draw pictures in this way. For example, fame is portrayed as white, infamy as black. This means that in a place which is famous one sees splendor and greatness. Since white is the color corresponding to brightness, fame is presented as white. Since infamy destroys everything that prevails as great, it is represented as black, the form of darkness. Virtue is described as white in color, and sin as black.

IX.8 Appropriate Representations of God

Master: In the same way images for God are made depicted in painting, etc.[76] You must understand how images of God come into existence.

[83] Disciple: I am eager to receive clarification on this point.

Master: One cannot say that the Lord, who is indivisible and invisible to bodily eyes, has a body with parts. Wise people who understand this truth realized that one should not make images by painting, etc., which would suggest some form for God. Those convinced of this truth instead taught how God could be presented through images made by paintings, etc., in a symbolic way. By describing one thing in a picture, they made known something else.

Disciple: Kindly explain this to me by an example.

Master: To show that God has no beginning or end, some drew a circle in their picture. By this picture they did not intend to say that God is round; rather, their intention was to show that just as a circle with its round shape has no beginning or end, so too the transcendent-and-immanent Being has no beginning or end. This was their only intention. Therefore, by making such images for God

[75] Latin: justitia, Greek: diké, etc.

[76] There is a brief gap in the text here.

in paintings, etc., they could show a visible form while pointing out something else.

But after a long period of time, a later generation of people who lacked understanding about the transcendent-and-immanent Being and were dull-witted started calling the round-shaped figure, the circle itself, God. Even though some did not (explicitly) equate the circle with God, in their confusion they accepted the idea that God has a round shape.

Disciple: Due to this teaching I can understand how such images originated here too.

[84] Master: Tell me how.

Disciple: In some places here people have pictured the transcendent-and-immanent Being as having three eyes.[77] It seems to me that the philosophers of ancient times portrayed God in this way in order to show that in his immense knowledge the Lord sees everything that has taken place, all that is happening at the present time, and all that will happen in the future; he knows all the happenings of the past, the present, and the future. Or it could mean that the Lord creates anew whatever is lacking, protects created things, and according to his will allows those who deserve hell to get destroyed. For such reasons they picture God with three eyes.

I have also heard educated people here saying that the transcendent-and-immanent Being has five eyes, since God is the creator, the protector, the destroyer, the creator of ignorance, and the one who satisfies desires, i.e., by grace, God is the giver of liberation.[78] In order to indicate these five functions, the

[77] It is common in the iconography of Śiva to portray him with a third eye, often "the eye of wisdom."

[78] In Śaiva Siddhānta and other schools of Śaivism, these five activities — creation, preservation, destruction, the creation of ignorance, and its removal — are attributed to Śiva.

philosophers said that God has five faces, but their intent was not to say that God actually has five faces.

Master: What you have explained in detail until now will suffice.

3
Inquiry into the Meaning of "God"

I. Advice to intelligent people

A certain ascetic desires that everyone should gain what is good. He therefore wants to offer an inquiry into the meaning of "God," so that, in this way, he can indicate the only way for anyone to reach the shore of ultimate liberation.[1] For this reason, he has written the following "Brief Discourse." The intelligent person who knows the most important reality and is intent on attaining the goal which is above everything else will not despise spending a few minutes thinking about such matters.

Humans have both bodies and souls. Of these two, the body perishes and becomes dust and ashes. We see this clearly. But the soul is not destroyed along with the body. After its separation from the body, in accordance with its merits and demerits, it either attains its goal or goes to hell and suffers torment forever. There is no doubt about this either. But since only the true divine Reality[2] can grant the favor of salvation, and only he is capable of forgiving sins, those who worship something that is not God and trust in such things will not attain ultimate liberation and the remission of sins. This too is certain.

In such an important matter an intelligent person must therefore avoid any mistakes. He must not close his eyes like a blind man and accept just any god. He must examine the matter thoroughly and find out with certainty who is the true God, and then accept him.

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1 I.e., the "farther shore," the better place beyond this side, this world. Crossing over to the other shore of a river is a common image for salvation in Hindu and Buddhist texts.

2 Throughout, de Nobili uses the term "vastu" for God, i.e., a substantial and objective thing, reality. As in the *Dialogue*, he qualifies it occasionally with "transcendent and immanent," to indicate particular mode of accessibility and mystery. Throughout we translate it as "Reality."

II.Do you know if the God you worship is the true God?

Before acquiring a gem which supports the life of the mortal body for just a few days, one examines quite carefully the true characteristics of the gem in order to ascertain if it is real. [105][3] Similarly, before agreeing on an amount which is just a day's income, one must verify whether that money is genuine or false. Only a stupid fellow would acquire this gem or money without first inquiring. In the same way, one who is keen on reaching the (farther) shore must know the characteristics of that Reality who grants eternal life to the soul. He will inquire thoroughly whether the God he worships is the true God or not. If he finds that this is the true God who grants ultimate liberation and forgives sins, only then will he accept (that God). But if he finds that this is not the true God, and does not have the above mentioned power, but still trusts and worships it then, one can reasonably ask whether he is a stupid fellow or not. But since we realize that many people go the wrong way since they do not know the several characteristics of the true Reality, we will now briefly make those characteristics known. One who is desirous of reaching the (farther) shore must read and think carefully about this.

III. Characteristics of the true God

Among the characteristics of the transcendent and immanent Reality, the six (key) characteristics are summed up in the following verse:

He is (1.) self-existent, (2.) without beginning, (3.) without a body, (4.) by nature possessed of all good qualities, (5.) all-pervasive, and (6.) Lord of all; I reverence this first cause.[4]

[3] We have included the page numbers from Fr. Rajamanickam's Tamil edition, to aid those who wish to consult the original.

[4] These six attributes could derive from Indian or European origins, and in any case fit both contexts. While the rest of the *Inquiry* is in (Sanskritized) Tamil, this verse is comprised entirely of Sanskrit words: *svayaṁbhu* (self-existent) *anādi* (without beginning) *aśarīri* (without body) *samastaśubhasvarūpiyaḥ* (by nature possessed of all good qualities) *sarvavyāpi* (all-pervasive) *sarveśa* (Lord of all) *nidānaṁ* (first cause) *namāmi aham* (I reverence). For the sake of comparison, here is a list of eight attributes put forward by the 13th century Hindu theologian Vedānta Deśika in his *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*: i. the Lord is ruler over all; ii. he is conscious and all-pervasive in knowing; iii. everything is totally dependent upon him; iv. he is propitiated by all religious actions and gives all the fruits [accruing to worship]; v. he is the foundation for everything; vi. he is the generator of all things that are made; vii. he has all things, other than his own knowledge and own self [which are his self], as his body; viii. all that he wishes comes true, due simply to himself. These lists are quite similar, but a key difference is evident as we read further on in *The Inquiry*. de Nobili will use his criteria to judge and exclude mythological portrayals of God, but Hindu theologians like Deśika are more likely to sort out audiences; only the more sophisticated and learned will conceive of God in a way that is fully appropriate to the reasonable definition of God.

To make known the meaning of this verse we will now explain it word by word.

III.1 "Self-existent"

"Self-existent" is the first characteristic of the true Reality. I.e., it must exist of itself. [106] The meaning of self-existence is that someone's nature, existence, and power are not received from someone else. The rationale for this characteristic is that if the transcendent and immanent Reality were to receive its nature and existence from another's hand, the bestower of these would have to be greater than the recipient. In that case, not the recipient but the bestower would be called that Reality. Moreover, whatever is created must be limited in each of its powers. A reality receiving its origin and continuation from another cannot create anything, and such a person would have to be called a limited being. Flawed and limited, it could not be said to be the transcendent and immanent Reality. Therefore, the Lord who is that Reality must necessarily be self-existent.

III.2 "Without beginning"

The second characteristic is "without beginning." I.e., the transcendent and immanent Reality must be beginningless, without an origin or birth. Thus it is described as "without beginning." The rationale for this characteristic is the following. If there is a beginning and birth, there must be some cause giving rise to this

new beginning and birth. Since the transcendent and immanent Reality is uncaused, it cannot have a beginning and birth.

If one were to say that he makes himself be born, then it would have to be said that he is the cause for himself. Since a cause must be prior to its effect, to say that he is cause for himself amounts to saying that "the one who was before" became "one who is after." But this would be contrary to reason. So the transcendent and immanent Reality must necessarily be beginningless, i.e., without beginning and birth.

III.3 "Without body"

"Without a body" indicates that the transcendent and immanent Reality cannot have a body. We see clearly in our experience that whatever possesses a body has an origin and is mortal. Since this Reality has no birth and death, he cannot have a body. Moreover, the limbs of a body are measurable, so everything that has a body must be limited. But since a limited thing cannot be the transcendent and immanent Reality, neither can that Reality be said to have a body. [107] He cannot have the limited measure of bodily parts which things have, so one cannot say that he has a mouth or head or fingers or stomach. To say this would be senseless. One must therefore say that this Reality is without body and without parts.

III.4 "By Nature Possessed of all Good Qualities"

"By nature possessed of all good qualities" means that the transcendent and immanent Reality must by nature possess all good qualities. The rationale for this fourth characteristic is that if he is lacking in any good quality, he would have to be said to be a deficient being, and could not be said to be the transcendent and immanent Reality. Moreover, a person is capable of giving to one and all only from what he already has; he cannot give to others what he does not have. Since the Reality bestows on his own creatures good things such as power, happiness, knowledge, etc., he must necessarily possess those beneficial things, power, happiness, and knowledge. He should not have any defects or limitations. So he must have all good things without limitation, unlike created beings

which possess goods which are defective and limited. Therefore, he must necessarily possess immeasurable knowledge, unlimited power, flawless justice, limitless happiness, boundless compassion, and goodness unaffected by even the smallest defect.

III.5 "All-pervasive"

"All-pervasive" means that this Reality must pervade everything. To say that he is present in one place and is absent in another place would amount to admitting that he is limited. If he is not limited, one has to admit that he is necessarily fully present everywhere. But to stand, to lie down, and to sit[5] are associated with the body, so such postures cannot be attributed to him. Therefore, one must say that by knowledge and power, and by being of himself the cause, he is present everywhere. [108] Since he knows by his boundless knowledge everything that happens everywhere, it must be said that he is present everywhere simply by that knowledge. Since he rules everything by his will, it must be said that he is present everywhere simply by his power. Finally, since he is the cause for maintaining things everywhere so that they do not disappear all at once, it must be said that he is present everywhere, because he is the cause (of everything).

III.6 "Lord of all" and "first cause"

"Lord of all" means that he is the "first cause" of everything. The rationale for this is the following. All created things exist within a fixed frame. But there must be a first cause for everything, a cause apart from created things, unlimited, beyond all fixed boundaries. Aside from the transcendent and immanent Reality, there is no other unlimited being, nor would there be any created being at all (if there were no such Reality). So the transcendent and immanent Reality must be considered the first cause of everything.

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5 These are three traditional positions taken by major deities in Hindu temples. Lying down indicates transcendence, sitting indicates royal power, and standing indicates active involvement in the world.

III.7 "I reverence"

"I reverence" indicates that I should reverence only the Reality which has these characteristics. The six characteristics we have mentioned until now are in accord with reason, since anything that contradicts these characteristics is contradictory to reason. Since the transcendent and immanent Reality has revealed these characteristics to humans only in his Veda,[6] these characteristics must be said to be present only in that Reality. No one should say that even one of these characteristics was conjured up by a small mind. Only a Reality with these characteristics is above all beings, and so we call him alone the transcendent and immanent Reality. And since he alone is the creator of all things, we also call him "Lord of all."

IV. What sort of God is being worshipped?

An intelligent person who is desirous of reaching the shore of ultimate liberation should be able to open the eyes of devotion [109] and to decide whether the God he worships is the true God, the true Reality or not. But to make these things clear we shall show straight-away that those people in this country who accept many different kinds of gods are all heading to ruin. In showing this, our only intention is that everyone should come to understand the truth and reach the shore of ultimate liberation. We do not mean to utter any kind of (mere) criticism nor to hurt anyone. Such is not in any way our thought or intention.

V. Idols are not God

First of all, the many idols consecrated in different temples are not God. To say this would surely contradict reason. I.e., can the sculptor and the potter make the Lord who creates everything? If idols break, does (God) also break? (If idols) fall down, they are unable to get up by themselves; doesn't someone have to lift them up? Could the Reality, which is fully present everywhere, be contained in a room, in a pot, in the palm of a human hand, or within the four corners of a cloth? Some intelligent people clearly

[6] In revelation, in the revealed scriptures.

understand that this would be against reason, but others, taking a different approach, respond as follows: "We consider as divine only gods like the three persons[7] mentioned in the Veda and the traditions,[8] not the idols which are made out of stone, bronze, and mud. The latter are just symbols of the gods, so the worship, other rituals, and praise which we offer to the gods are (simply) performed in front of these symbols."

VI. Idols Do Not Have the Six Characteristics

The devotion of the good souls who give such answers is in vain. [110] Without thinking it a betrayal, they should inquire carefully whether the persons pointed out by the symbols — i.e., by their idols — are true gods or not. Is there an easy way to find this out? Yes, one can examine the six characteristics of the true Reality we have already pointed out. If any of these characteristics is lacking in any god, then such a one cannot be the true God and the true Reality. Any intelligent person should be able to ascertain this.

VI.1 The Hindu Gods are Not (1) Self-Existent nor (2) Without Beginning

Therefore, since the Reality must be self-existent and without any beginning, the children of the highest female power, the children of parents such as Śiva and Parvatī,[9] those who existed in certain places and others like them — all these had to be created by other persons, and therefore cannot be said to be self-existent or without a beginning. Therefore, they lack the first two characteristics of that Reality, so one cannot call them that Reality. An intelligent person must examine whether this is consonant with logic and reason or not.

[7] Probably the "three forms" (*trimūrti*) of God favored in some popular forms of Hinduism: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

[8] I.e., the texts known as the *purāṇas*.

[9] Śiva is one of the foremost of the Hindu Gods, and Parvatī his divine consort.

VI.2 The Hindu Gods are Not (3) Without Body Nor (5) All-Pervasive

Being "without a body" is the third characteristic of the true Reality. Those beings who are made with forms, areas such as head, chest, tongue, etc., those endowed with three, four or five faces, those whose heads get cut off, those endowed with such and such a head or such and such a stomach, male ones and female ones — an intelligent person must inquire whether such beings have bodies or not. Everything that is embodied is limited and cannot be present everywhere; moreover, they are created being which have their progenitors as their cause, and they cannot be the first cause. Therefore, the above mentioned beings are lacking in the third and fifth characteristics of that Reality, so they cannot be considered that Reality.

VI.3 The Hindu Gods are Not (4) By Nature Possessed of all Good Qualities

Now we shall examine whether or not such gods possess the fourth characteristic: i.e., God is by nature possessed of all good qualities, without limit. [111] So far we have established without any doubt the following points. If ignorance is found in any of someone's undertakings, one must say that such a person possesses immense knowledge. If there is weakness, one must also say that he does not have unlimited power. If sorrow is seen in him, one must say that he does not possess boundless joy. If cruelty is found in him, one must say that he does not have limitless compassion. If injustice is seen in him, one must say that he is infinitely just. Finally, if even a trace of sin is found in someone, such a person cannot be said to be possessed of all good qualities.

If so, consider the following.[10] Not knowing where something was, (Viṣṇu) searched for it after assuming the form of pig and

[10] Here and in the following paragraphs de Nobili lists in the briefest of forms allusions to various myths. Many of the details are gleaned from oral traditions, so that even when it is possible to identify the reference — e.g., to a myth of Śiva or Rāma — it remains difficult to identify a particular textual source for the version he gives.

boar; without knowing to which place his wife has been abducted, (Rāma) inquired in all four directions through emissaries;[11] not knowing how his wife begot a son, but deciding that she had had intercourse,[12] (Śiva) beheaded the culprit; not knowing the tricks of the demons, he asked a teacher; one was perplexed as to what reward he should give to one who uttered his name twice; after Śiva offered his spear and magic-sword to Rāvaṇa, on the advice of someone else, he transformed them in order to cheat Rāvaṇa;[13] (Rāma) came to know the news of his father's death only after reading a letter; (Śiva) considered the feet of another woman (Gangā) as an ornament to his head. Any intelligent person must admit, without any bias, whether such events are due to a lack of reason and that deficiency which is ignorance — or, rather, due to unlimited knowledge or boundless reason.

Similarly: recognizing the maiden in the form of a deer, one (god) beheaded the maiden; (Rāma) gathered an army of monkeys in order to destroy the demon;[14] [112] Śiva sought the help of 330,000,000 gods in order to conquer the three cities;[15] (Indra) was frightened by the curse of human sages; (Indra) was ashamed of the forms seen on his body due to the curse of an insignificant human being, so he prayed to an ascetic in order to make these marks appear to others as eyes;[16] for the sake of the boon given to him by the almighty Lord, another one roamed around mistakenly, and because of this hid

[11] In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma's wife Sitā is kidnapped and he has to search for her with the help of others.

[12] Uncertain.

[13] Śiva gave Rāvaṇa his spear and sword; after Rāvaṇa was defeated, he took them back.

[14] Rāma was aided by an army of monkeys in his search for Sitā

[15] The cosmic achievement of the destruction of the cities by Śiva is enhanced by the involvement of all the gods.

[16] Indra had been the king of the gods in the Vedic context, but he was often mocked and degraded later on. Here, his thousand eyes — signs of his all-seeing power — are interpreted as transmuted yoṇis (female sexual organs).

himself under a hand;[17] in order to remove the sin incurred by his mistake, (Rāma) worshipped the liṇgam;[18] and so on. Any intelligent person must examine whether such things are characteristics of immense power — or signs of weakness.

Here are some more examples: one was saddened because his trident was missing; (Rāma) wept because of his father's death; (Viṣṇu) assumed the form of a celestial dancer (Mohinī);[19] in order to be united with another, Śiva begged and wandered about, weeping; one was cursed;[20] (Kṛṣṇa) tried to cheat his uncle;[21] on many occasions another one sweated and fainted;[22] another, because he thought, "she has had intercourse (with someone other than me)," beheaded (his own son), but then he was remorseful and regretted this, so he replaced that head with the head of an elephant;[23] all the gods felt ashamed because the daughter (Damayantī) of the king of Vidarbha did not choose to garland them;[24] and so on. Anyone who reads this must decide whether such deeds are due to a lack of happiness — or are signs of immense joy.

17 Uncertain.

18 As above in the *Dialogue*, a reference to Rāma's penitential worship of Śiva at Rameśvaram after killing Rāvaṇa.

19 As Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu assumed an infatuating female form in order to deceive demons.

20 Uncertain.

21 Kṛṣṇa's uncle was Kaṁsa, who was threatened by the birth of Kṛṣṇa and sought to kill him.

22 Who?

23 In some myths about Gaṇeśa, the son of Śiva, Gaṇeśa's elephant-head is explained by an account of how Śiva angrily or mistakenly beheaded him and had to find another head for the boy.

24 In a famous story, Damayanti bypasses the gods come down to earth in love with her, and instead chooses Nala as her husband.

Moreover, Cirutoṇṭan, an ordinary devotee, cooked and ate his own son as meat;[25] sacrifices such as the blood of brahmins were accepted by Brahmā with delight as dear offerings; the blood sacrifice of merchants was pleasing to the Lord of the gods;[26] the blood offering of a low-caste person pleased Supaśu; the sacrifice of Sūrar to Nāgar was accepted as pleasing; (Viṣṇu) drinking the blood of Hiraṇya in a frenzy of anger;[27] and so on. Are these (gods) not cruel? Everyone must consider this question clearly and ask whether these deeds are characteristic of one who is possessed of immense compassion.

[113] There is still more: (Śiva) kept his own mother, the Female Power, as his wife;[28] (Brahma) slept with his own daughter (Sarasvatī) under the pretense of art; another lusted after the women of the village, and became a beggar for this;[29] (Śiva) betrayed his own wife, the highest female power; (Kṛṣṇa) went after many women, and as a result was rejected by them; he stole butter, and for this was beaten (by his mother).[30] An intelligent person should decide without bias whether such shameful stories are contrary to justice or are the deeds of the Lord whose form is immeasurable justice.

It is also necessary to examine whether the above mentioned deeds are sins or virtues. Those who practice witchcraft are

25 This story of Cirutoṇṭar is recounted in the Śaiva text known as the *Periya Purāṇam*.

26 Indra and Agni tested Emperor Sibi's virtue by sending a dove chased by an eagle; Sibi offered his own flesh in replacement of that of the dove.

27 As in the *Dialogue*: Viṣṇu appears as half lion and half human, and destroys the demon Hiraṇya, who had been promised that he would be killed by neither man nor beast.

28 Perhaps in the sense that Parā Śakti, the highest female power, is the mother of the universe and yet also the wife of Śiva.

29 There is a famous cycle of stories connected with Kṛṣṇa dancing with the cowherd women, and perhaps this myth alludes to an incident in that cycle.

30 There is a story, popular even today, of the baby Kṛṣṇa stealing butter from the churn, and for this being chastised by his mother.

considered by all as guilty of heinous crimes. (But these gods) use various tempting mantras (magic spells), they give assistance in very wicked crimes, and indeed they are the primary cause for such deeds. An intelligent person will be able to decide whether all this is sin or virtue.

Moreover, respectable people examine the various stinks and are repulsed by their shameless deeds, drinking intoxicants, and forbidden carnal behaviors. An intelligent person should ask without bias whether performing with delight this kind of worship (for such gods) is sin or virtue, whether it is fitting to the Lord who is possessed of all good qualities, and what the difference is between such rituals and the rituals performed by great souls in the presence of the transcendent and immanent Reality.

VII. Answer to Six Doubts

Knowledge, power, and the other goods such as discussed by us until now can be found in works like the Vedas and traditions, in festive celebrations and paintings. One cannot say that we invented them in our minds.[31] Even if out of devotion to his god or out of obstinacy [114] someone tries to give a different response regarding one or two of the preceding points, no answer can remove them all. But in order that the truth might shine forth prominently in this matter, we will now give simple answers to six doubts that might occur to anyone.

VII.1 "The Deeds of the Gods Are Merely Play"

Some say, "all these deeds must be considered as the sports and holy play of the gods, not as sins or a lack of goodness. Whatever the gods do befits them." To find out if this response is agreeable to reason or not let us make a comparison. If you see a great person, e.g., a great and very intelligent scholar, playing in the street with children, or going about naked, you will say that he is behaving disrespectfully. There is no doubt about this.

[31] de Nobili seems to mean that both the six characteristics and the contrary stories of the gods are well known and not fabricated by himself.

How then could such games befit very intelligent, great souls? Besides, if the power of the gods permits such deeds that are so inherently detrimental to their power, then it would have to be said that the greater the person, the greater too will be the license for such sports. When you see them you will ask how great people can do such things, and how anyone might say that such things befit an immensely glorious person. By the arguments we have provided until now, an intelligent people can discover clearly that the above mentioned gods are not the Reality. But they continue with another objection.

VII.2 "Such Beings Are Merely Representatives of the True Reality"

They say, "Even if these persons are not that Reality, they are courtiers to it, and on that basis we honor them. The honors given to the manager who stands in the place of the king are (really) due to the king himself." To find out whether this answer is agreeable to reason or not, one must understand the following. First, if someone is to be manager for a king, [115] he should know the good and bad qualities of the king and act as befits the king. If so, then you should inquire whether or not the above mentioned deeds befit a Lord who is the form of all goodness, and whether these deeds would be agreeable to his will.

Second, suppose the following situation. Instead of letting the king receive the taxes owed the king, along with the signs of honor due a king (e.g., the throne, crown, scepter, etc., all the king's insignia) the manager takes the honors for himself. If this happens, one must inquire whether a king would ever grant his representative permission to act in this way, and whether such a person is really a representative of the king or instead someone who betrays him. One must also ask whether it is a sign of the Lord's true representative, or rather the sign of one who betrays the Lord, if instead of giving everything to the Lord, people instead receive and give to someone else the worship and other rituals (e.g., pouring melted butter, etc.) which are the honors, royal symbols, and taxes due only to the king of kings, Reality. Third, even if such figures really are the managers

and representatives of that Reality, you must still ask whether it is more honorable to serve the king of kings or these mere representatives.

VII.3 "Good or Bad, Such Beings Are Validated by Scripture and Tradition"

Even if a few reasonable people admit all these things, still they may waver and leave room for another doubt: "If one looks at all this reasonably, it is true that they are neither gods nor representatives of gods. But so many texts — Vedas, traditional texts, texts of praise — and scholars too, all speak of the gods' greatness and compose devotional hymns; could it all be merely lies? So many great people like scholars, priests, and lords worship them; can it be said that all these people have gone astray?" The answer to this doubt is as follows. Everything becomes clear if one examines how such Vedas and traditional texts originated and who wrote them. [116] But to explain this from the beginning would require an elaborate discussion.[32] But instead of judging them all true, for the time being we shall point out only one special feature.

Learned people sing the praises of their masters in order to please them and to get favors from them, e.g., gifts and other means of livelihood. This we see clearly in daily life. One cannot assume that whatever great poets sing is true. Just as learned people sing today, we must realize that even in ancient times each one sang whatever came into his mind and suited his purpose. It is therefore not a sign of intelligence to believe all this firmly just because this or that devotional hymn has been sung by this or that poet. Particularly when a few things contrary to reason and right thinking are included, it would be unfair to trust them, even if people call such poems "Vedas" or "traditional texts."

For example, milk mixed with poison, even if it is tasty, still kills the body. So too, sweet sayings mixed with falsehood, when

[32] Chapters 6-9 of the *Dialogue* have a great deal to say about the origins of false ideas and practices.

regarding important matters, kill the soul. There is no doubt about this. When scholars and others who occupy the role of teacher honor the various gods, one must ask them directly whether they venerate them because they think them as true gods or just for the sake of the gifts or some other reason. If they do not reveal their real purpose (i.e., why they do such things), then each person must follow what is suitable to understanding and reasoning and not accept deeds contrary to that understanding.

Instead of saying anything new concerning kings, lords, and other masters, we will point out only one special feature. [117] I.e., instead of spending one's wealth listening vainly to the words of those who come forward (with fine words) merely for the sake of their bodily needs, invoking someone who has neither divinity nor creative power which can grant the good things of the next world, it is better to spend one's wealth on one's own personal duty and other practices. No one can doubt this.

VII.4 "Such Beings Are Effective in Responding to People's Needs"

There is also a fourth doubt which troubles some people who say, "We know from experience that these gods appear in visions to some people and grant the favors they ask for. If they do not have creative power and divinity, how does this come about?" This doubt will be easily cleared up if one knows who these (gods) are. One can then realize, based on the reasons given above, that the beings encountered (in visions, etc.) and those who grant such visions are not gods. This is true regardless of whether they are favorable to the human race or hostile. (If hostile, one should also think about) why this hostility has arisen. But this is not the occasion to bring out all these points. For the time being we will give just one comparison.

A fisherman attaches bait on his fishhook so that the fish get caught on the hook and die. Such is his intention. He does not intend to feed the fish so that they can survive; he has no concern at all for the fish. So it is with the visions you speak about, the cases of possession, oracles, and boons. You must reflect well on whether

(these gods) are showing true concern for you, or whether their favors are like the fishhook with the bait; indeed, being caught by them is the way people come to suffer undying death in hell.

VII.5 "It Would be Too Difficult to Abandon Such Beings and Turn to the True God"

The fifth doubt is this: "Whatever has been said until now is surely agreeable to the mind and reason. But it is still difficult to behave according to the Lord God's directions." But those who give this response do not have the desire to reach the shore of ultimate liberation, and they surely risk getting lost.

[118] In order to live a little longer, a sick person does not hesitate to drink hard medicines that are harsh, sour, and bitter in taste. (By contrast) some people do not dare to make an effort, even for a few days, so that they can live forever enjoying the favors of everlasting liberation. Instead they risk falling into hell where they will experience hardships that cannot be comprehended by mind and word! A farmer will reap the fruit at the harvest time, only if he has tried hard to protect the fields day and night, whether the rain falls or the sun scorches. If he did not try, his farming would not succeed. Likewise, if humans try hard in matters pertaining to righteousness as long as they are alive in this world — i.e., during the time of sowing — then they will attain the fruit of ultimate liberation which will be enjoyed forever after death, during the harvest time.

We do not order you to give up the wealthy possessions you so enjoy, as well as lordly occupations and other affluent shows and family attachments. Nor do we say that you must retire to the forest and perform difficult penances. (All we are saying is this:) Everyone can enjoy all the favors mentioned above, like great rulers over them, but all must worship only the true Lord God, and behave according to reason. Such is the path that leads to the ever-abiding fruit. Intelligent people should examine whether this path, supposedly so difficult, is valid or not.

VII.6 "For Better or Worse, Our Ancestors Worshipped Such Beings"

As a final objection, some will agree wholeheartedly with everything that has been said until now, but still point out a different way to walk the path of ultimate liberation: "Our ancestors, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, all worshipped these gods and followed this path. How can we leave this path and follow another way? Until now our family has never made such a decision. If we begin to go this new way, others will surely insult and abuse us." In order to decide whether this reply is suited to an intelligent man or not, we shall make only one or two comparisons.

[119] Suppose you learn that your ancestors, e.g., your father and mother, were on the way to the city of Madurai, lost their way and fell in the hands of the robbers and were beheaded. If you yourself were then to start your own journey to Madurai, surely you would avoid that route and go instead by a (safer) way, pointed out by experienced people. Moreover, even if all your ancestors died due to extreme poverty, you would still obtain wealth in order to live well. You would not say, "Just as my ancestors died of hunger, so I too must die that way."

If so, you will realize, according to the above arguments, that your ancestors missed the path of ultimate liberation because they performed divine worship for gods who have no divinity, and thus failed to worship the true God, were caught by "robbers," fell into hell, and merited undying damnation. They were without the knowledge of that Reality which is the substance that bestows eternal life; they were immersed in ignorance which is like poverty and hardship, and therefore they got lost. If you too walk by that same path and risk getting lost just as your ancestors got lost, there will be no greater fool than you. But if you would just avoid sin and follow the path of virtue — without violating social practices of your (family) tradition — only a fool or barbarian would insult and abuse you. An intelligent person would never do that. You should

not pay attention to it even if someone insults you ignorantly, so that you will be able to attain the fruit of ultimate liberation.[33]

Apart from the truths we have mentioned until now, there are many other mysteries that one should know which are related to that Reality which takes you to the shore of ultimate liberation, and which are related to this discourse itself. If you want to reach the shore of (ultimate liberation) you must ask elders about them, so that you can know them. But if you do not care about these things, then hell alone will be your destiny, and we will not be responsible for you. [120]

VIII. The Ten Commandments

Just as we made known a few characteristics by which one could discern the true Reality, it also occurs to us to include in this Brief Discourse some clear characteristics by which to ascertain which is the true Veda, so that no one could cheat others regarding the Veda. But for various reasons we must leave these aside at present.[34] Instead, for the sake of all who desire to follow the reasonable path of justice, we will record just a few of the commandments found in the Veda, revealed by the Lord God himself so that people might reach salvation. The divine commandments revealed by God to people are ten:

1. The first among them is this: I am the Lord God, your creator. Let there not be for you any other lord or god apart from me.
2. Do not utter in vain the holy name of the Lord God.
3. Remember to observe the holy days of the Lord God.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. Do not kill.
6. Do not commit the sins of lust or adultery.
7. Do not be a thief.
8. Do not be a false witness.

[33] de Nobili thus points out the likelihood of social difficulties for those who become Christian. He discusses this point amply in the *Report*.

[34] The way to discover the true Veda is amply discussed in the *Dialogue*, especially chapters 4 and 5.

9. Do not desire the wife of another.
10. Do not covet the belongings of others.

These ten commandments are also contained in two. The first is, Love God above all things, while the second is, Love others as you love yourself.

Know this, and act accordingly.

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